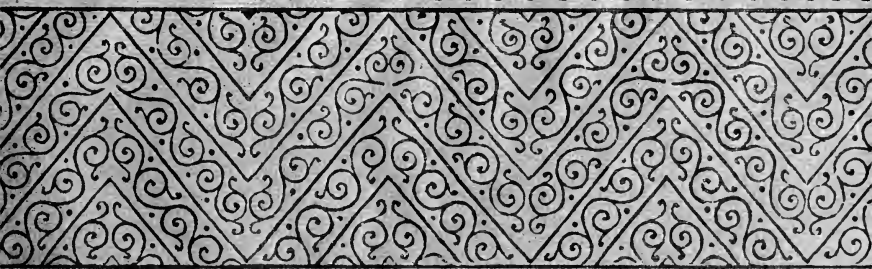




GODWYN'S ORDEAL



MRS JOHN KENT SPENDER





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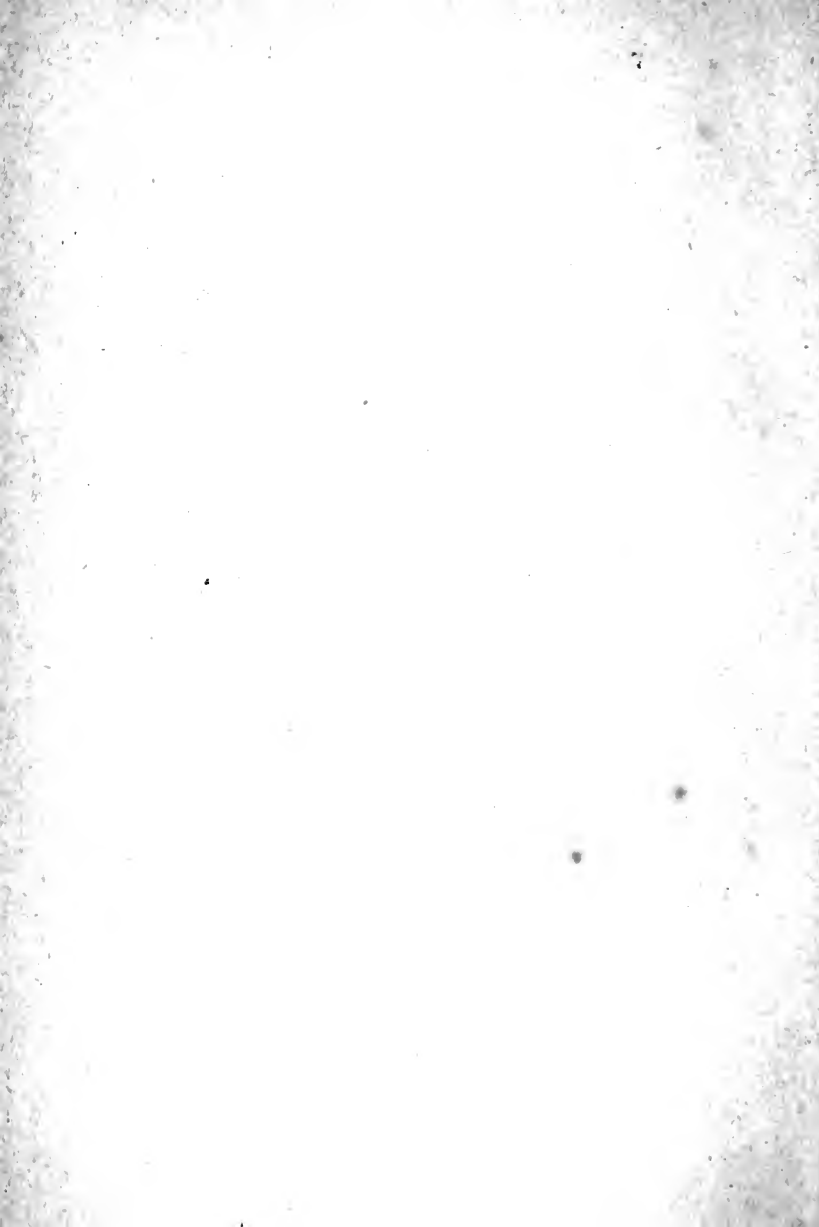
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GODWYN'S ORDEAL.

VOL. II.

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GODWYN'S ORDEAL

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

“BOTH IN THE WRONG,” “MARK EYLMER’S REVENGE,”

“PARTED LIVES,” “JOCELYN’S MISTAKE,”

“HER OWN FAULT,” &c., &c.

“She, not only through her wit,
Coud all the feat of wifely homeliness,
But eke, when that the case requiréd it
The common profit coudè she redress;
There nas discórd, rancour, nor heaviness,
In all that land that she ne coud appease,
And wisely bring them all in rest and ease.

Ó! needless was she tempted in assay!
But wedded men ne knowen no mesure
Whan that they find a patient créature.”

CHAUCER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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GODWYN'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER I.

“THE boy has had a refreshing sleep, and is easier now. He raised his eyes so wistfully when I came in that I did not like to leave him till I had sat with him a little while,” said Godwyn, in anxious apology, as she came in late for luncheon a few days afterwards, with an unwonted flush on her cheeks from her hasty walk.

Mrs. Melksham only shrugged her shoulders.

“It did not,” as she often explained, “signify much to her now whatever freaks her brother’s ward might take into her head, as her own visit to the manor-house could not be prolonged for ever;” and she had a way of ignoring the stories which Godwyn told, and which other people believed to be true, as if they were apocryphal. “All that cant about patching up cottages and taking care of the poor” seemed to her to be very far-fetched, but beyond stinging little allusions, properly sheathed and sugared, she no longer interfered with Godwyn as she had been wont to interfere.

“It is just like her when she was a child,” she had remarked confidentially to her brother one day. “She defies all womanly restraints and restrictions. If she goes to such places she should

not be allowed to come back and bring infection to the rest of us."

"I have sent for Doctor Bury from Knaresbury, and he repeats what I have already told you that typhoid is not infectious," answered James Bardsley.

What else the doctor might have said concerning the causes which had developed this fresh attack of typhoid, and which induced it so often to linger in the village in spite of the good sea-air, he kept to himself. But he no longer spoke in admiration of the picturesque cottages with the wood smoke thin and curling, embroidering the air with an upward silvery spire which would have delighted Turner, or in disapproval of his *protégée's* quiet but resolute revolt; he no longer excused himself by saying it was useless to interfere with God's laws, when Godwyn persisted in her house to house

visiting, and he took eagerly to the doctor's suggestion of a free use of disinfectants. He even went to the length of sending for Hayden, and consulting him about a few mild reforms in the village, whilst for the first time he laughed quietly to himself as his sister Laura continued—

“What with the rights of women, the rights of labour, and all the diatribes they are always driving about rights this and rights that, the very foundations of society have been sapped; and Godwyn—if you don't watch her—is just the sort of girl to take part in these things. She always *was* odd and tiresome to manage.”

It was as difficult for Mrs. Melksham to find a listener in Mrs. Neale when she lifted her hands in deprecation and gentle horror, saying,

“What morbid sensibility! she can't

help them—they certainly don't pay much attention to cleanliness, but what can she possibly do to help them."

"She is a very pleasing, womanly girl," answered that lady, coming boldly to the defence, the good-humoured disc of her face looking more pleasant than ever. "All she wants is a husband to keep her a little in control."

"As if any girl with a morsel of spirit cared for the scoldings of elderly ladies!" cried Olive, who was perfectly aware that her mother wanted good-naturedly to take possession of Godwyn's future. The plan for a match between Mr. Bardsley's penniless ward and the rich and prosperous manager, Mr. Hayden, seemed to Olive a capital one. "It would be different for *nous autres*, you know," she had remarked with her slightly French accent, when the scheme was

propounded to her, being perfectly aware that Hayden had risen from the ranks; "but I have no doubt, as you say, Mr. Bardsley will be pleased to see her so comfortably settled before he dies."

"And Mr. Hayden evidently admires her very much, though Miss Rachel *does* declare she flirts with Mr. Bardsley's nephew, and that *he* likes her very much," and here Mrs. Neale lowered her voice and looked a little anxiously at her daughter.

"Oh, a detrimental always serves to get the hand in," answered Olive scornfully. "Her flirtations with Humphrey are very mild ones indeed. He is kind to her, of course, as to a dependent of his uncle's, but depend upon it *she* knows just what his kindness means, and keeps her scaling-ladders for walls which are more accessible."

“And if you have remarked, *he* does not take the trouble to snub her, though strong-minded girls have always been his special abhorrence. Now, if he snubbed her it would be a very bad sign indeed,” continued the elder lady. “I have always remarked, in the course of my life, that no man takes the trouble to find fault with a girl unless he thinks she will be the better for his correction.”

All this was intended to be reassuring; but Olive, though she carried it off with a high manner in the presence of her mother, was not in her heart quite at ease. Though Humphrey's face was, as Mrs. Neale said, “quite a study” when any one tried to find fault with Godwyn, she was not quite sure what the “study” might portend. Perhaps it meant that Humphrey was as well

aware as she was herself of the something in her rival, which she was made to feel with painful envy, was unapproachable by herself—a dignity which caused her a pang of jealousy—a simplicity which she felt her acting could not equal. It was this dignity which stood the lonely Godwyn in good stead when Christine, in her mistaken devotion, insisted on repeating to her some of the detracting observations which she had heard made.

“I don’t think it makes much difference if we are abused behind our backs if people are pleasant to our faces,” she answered with a ready smile, hushing up the child.

“But they say—my mother says—that you are pretending to be so self-denying and good just because you are setting your cap at the heir,” cried

Christine before she could be silenced.

“Do they—do they say *that*?” she answered as readily; “do they wonder because I have talked to Humphrey? Perhaps they do not understand the amount of friendship there was between us from the time we were boy and girl. Many people cannot understand friendship between a man and a woman.”

She had presence of mind so to answer, knowing that her explanation would probably be retailed, but when she was alone she shed tears over the words, feeling as if there were something vitriolic in them which would not be coaxed by any philosophy of hers into not burning. How she hated herself for the tears which betrayed her to herself! How it seemed to her as if Heaven had been kind to men in withholding the painful weak-

ness which makes it easy for women to flush and weep under the sting of unmerited accusation !

She felt quite shy when she met Mrs. Melksham again. The curious sort of nervous dread which she had exercised over her in childhood seemed to return to her once more.

“ You are to be my confidante in any matter which concerns *yourself*,” she said gently to Christine the next time they were alone together, “ but do not tell me anything which other people say about me.”

“ What a booby you must think me to have been talking such twaddle !” sighed Christine, already repentant. “ If you had been like any one else you would have said something clever and biting in reply to them.”

Till she met Godwyn there had been

no deep feeling at work in her heart, no appeals made to her affection, but now she was glad enough to talk about all sorts of things, for the uncomprehended emotions and unmapped country which she had within her puzzled her.

To Mrs. Melksham, whose children seemed in infancy to be like "raw material," ready to be moulded by her skilful, motherly fingers into artistic form, Christine had hitherto appeared to be a disappointing failure, a white image of helplessness, a creature the texture of whose nerves and the palpitations of whose heart were utterly unaccountable. Christine's elder sister had done so well for herself that all her sisters were expected to follow her example, so at least the girl morbidly complained, saying,

"Mamma will never be contented with

me. She has formed her own ideal, and I shall never come up to it."

And Godwyn, who had been in the habit of pitying herself for having lost her mother so early in life, was soon too ready to believe that her orphaned condition was better than having such an injudicious, worldly mother. Christine engrossed a good deal of her time. Her little fingers often came tapping at the door of Godwyn's bed-room, and she would apologise for her intrusion and for making her talk, and yet valued these intervals of conversation, and drank in encouraging words as if she were athirst. Her poor little mind was like an unstocked garden, ready for any seed that might be dropped into it; but though she was somewhat childish and tautological in her praises of the stronger Godwyn, yet the friendship was doing

her good. The diseased mood which had made everything seem dull to her was already giving way to a healthier condition, and even Mrs. Melksham was pleased when it transpired that her daughter was, under her new friend's surveillance, taking readily to her music.

The difficulty of learning to be content with her own inability to excel, and of persevering with an art which Godwyn assured her ought to be worth while in private for its own delight, was at last conquered by the girl. A bone of contention was done away with between herself and the mother; whilst as for Godwyn, if she had had her hours of sadness because the home to which she had returned seemed to be such a loveless one, perhaps the yearning affection of this delicate girl was

God's way of keeping her from becoming cold herself. Olive's demonstrations of affection never deceived her. Real life, with its simplicity and monotony, was wearying to Olive. Having always read novels of the pernicious sort from the circulating library, she created for herself an imaginary world, in which she would continue to be surrounded by luxury and excitement. And yet Mrs. Neale had been unfortunate in some of her investments, and Olive had been speculatively injudicious in discouraging some of her former suitors. It was desirable that the heir of the Dornton property should be brought as quickly as possible to an avowal.

"She knows that I have never had practice in riding, and that I shall look to very bad advantage beside her on horseback," thought Godwyn, seeing

through the motive directly when she heard Olive entreating Mr. Bardsley to use his authority and get his ward to join her in one of the expeditions which she and Humphrey had been planning to the neighbouring country.

“You learnt a little at school, my dear, and Miss Neale is quite right—you will never have a good seat if you don't keep up the habit of riding. I wish you to do like the rest,” the old man had said when she objected. And Godwyn, who had nothing of the coward in her, consented.

“Now for our trial of strength,” said Olive triumphantly to herself, as both girls came out equipped for the ride, the dress suiting her beautiful figure to perfection, whilst the costume placed her younger rival at a decided disadvantage.

“Why should I always send him away from me to please her?” thought Godwyn a minute afterwards, with a dash of impatience, as Olive beckoned Humphrey just when he appeared to mount her. “I have played too much perhaps into her hands already, and what is the consequence? She is so restlessly jealous that she grudges me even an act of the barest politeness. His coldness to me *may* be only apparent. Why should I trouble myself to take any notice of Mrs. Melksham’s inuendoes? I have done nothing to deserve them.”

“Up with you, dear!” cried a cheery voice at the same moment breaking in upon her reverie, and, looking round, she saw her uncle smiling encouragingly to her from the doorway.

There was no time to hesitate, and after all it was officious Mr. Hayden

who assisted her, whilst Humphrey, from the force of habit, obeyed the visitor's behest. Godwyn's heart swelled a little. For a minute she was ashamed of feeling that she would willingly have been a few years older to possess as perfectly modelled a figure, and to sit her horse with as queenly a grace, as Olive. It was only for a minute. Jealousy was not one of her faults, and at the next she had dismissed the thought as unworthy of her. She recovered her self-possession as Humphrey swung himself lightly into the saddle, and reined up his horse as usual by the side of Olive's chestnut mare.

It seemed to be the understood arrangement, and if Godwyn's heart sank with irrepressible mortification as she saw that Mr. Hayden had been invited to accompany her, there

was nothing for it but to submit herself to the inevitable. Latterly he had not been quite so persistent in the attentions which she discouraged, as if he had taken a sudden terror of her bright young face and truth-telling tongue, and as if her cold manner had proved very refrigerating to his ardour. But to-day he assumed the familiar attitude which had been so disagreeable to her. The mare which had been assigned to her proved to be slightly restive for so young a rider, and inclined to take fright at the smallest causes ; this gave Hayden the excuse for keeping closely by her, and occasionally placing a hand on her reins.

“ You should practise a little more,” he said, after they had ridden for some time in silence—the horses sniffing the air, and tossing their heads with delight as

they trotted up and down the flowery lanes—and Godwyn's kindly nature making her dread to seem unfriendly; "the mare is quiet enough, and I know my friend Bardsley purchased her partly for your use. You have kept so aloof from all the fun hitherto that the animal is too fresh; but it is quite a lady's horse—fit even for *you*," he added, rolling out his words with that way of speaking which so often annoyed and yet amused her.

"I have been so busy," murmured Godwyn in excuse. "I have had other things to do, and till lately they have not seemed to miss me from the riding parties."

"*They!* no, very likely not," he answered, with a pointed allusion to the couple who had fallen behind them. "But on Saturdays I am often free,

and shall be always ready to accompany you."

"Saturdays are about the worst days for me," she said, privately determining to be always engaged on future Saturdays.

"You give up your time too much for other people. I'm sure it's the most laudable resolution," he continued, "but allow me to say that the time is worse than wasted which is spent on these creatures, who have already such upstart notions. I do think things are coming to a fearful pass—what with the uppishness of the women, and the dreadful airs which the men give themselves."

She twitched restlessly at the reins, guiding her horse rapidly out of his way, forgetting her lack of horsemanship in her indignation at his words and her hope of clearing her difficulties

by cantering out of his reach. They were by this time more than a mile from Dornton, and the road lay between a precipitous gorge to the left and a new line of railway to the right. Anything seemed to be better than the companionship of the man who was so repulsive to her, and though the animal had set off at a rapid pace she was for the time quite unconscious of danger, delighted with the air and the invigorating exercise, and admiring the fine outline of the rocks which bounded the gorge. Meanwhile Mr. Hayden followed her at a little distance, afraid of alarming the mare by too close a pursuit, and already panic-stricken and helpless. He knew that Godwyn was fast losing all command over the mare; the canter was merging into a gallop, and the whole position became the

more alarming as he descried the smoke of a distant train coming on in the opposite direction.

“The up express!” he said in a tone of horror to himself. “The worst thing which could possibly have happened!”

He cried to her, but she did not seem to hear him; the horse only quickened its speed. A moment later and it took a fresh fright, as he had expected, at the train. The rider gave another jerk at the reins which irritated it anew, and with quivering nostrils and a sudden snort, it leaped the little fence which divided the road from the line of rail. Mr. Hayden felt the drops of moisture break out on his forehead as he pulled up transfixed with horror, believing that nothing could now save the girl whom he so admired from the most tragical fate. It might

be too late for the engine-driver to avert the catastrophe, for the engine seemed to be advancing at full speed on the same line of rail. He closed his eyes that he might not see what must inevitably follow, when at the same instant a wild-looking, athletic young man—tall, lithe, and mobile, with a swarthy face, in which the features of a sturdy type were rendered pleasanter by their natural adornment of light thick curly hair, and whose workman's shirt, slightly open, displayed the throat of a gladiator—started from the furze-bushes and underwood, which had hitherto concealed him, and taking in the whole danger at a glance, cleared the road and the fence with two or three bounds, seizing the horse's rein with his sinewy arm and forcing it off on the other side of the line of rail, at the imminent peril of

his own life. All was over in a few seconds; the train had rushed past, but Godwyn was safe; and in her rescuer, who had received some bruises from his sudden encounter with the horse, and who stood by her covered with dust, pale and exhausted, but still holding the panting animal, she had no difficulty in recognising Ned Carslake.

“These are the men you call ungrateful. It is the second time this man has saved my life,” she said, still keeping her seat though she was a little shaken, as Hayden, crossing the line, came up to her, controlling and calming himself as best he could, while his face was still pale from agitation. She was moved, and her voice, always rich and pathetic, reflected the emotion which she felt, not for herself, but for the man who had rescued her.

“I will speak to my uncle, he must

be handsomely rewarded," she said, ignoring the dead rabbit, the head of which was hanging out of the young workman's pocket, and the look of enmity with which he confronted the manager, who glanced at the offending pocket with profound disgust.

"You have been poaching on your half-holiday. I have always suspected it. You threw down some of your plunder when you started from your hiding-place; but your offence may be forgiven on account of the service you have rendered this young lady," said Hayden, speaking coldly, as he turned to the poacher. "Take your booty and be off with it, though you have no possible right to it."

He did not see the look of defiance, nor notice the cool nerve with which the man—who thought of his poaching

deeds and their possible consequences with stolid apathy—obeyed him, for his eyes were fixed upon Godwyn.

“How can you do such mad things?” he asked, as soon as they were alone, mastering his strong emotion as he attempted to take her hand and kiss it. But she wrenched it away from him, and cried, in a tone of abhorrence,

“Will you force me to do mad things again?”

What could the girl mean? Why such resentment in her eyes? He guessed nothing of the bitterness which swelled through her heart, nothing of the pain, almost like physical torture, which caused her to dread being left alone with him, and made her wrench her hand from him in a way which he had not anticipated.

“Why did you ride in such a harum-scarum way?” he asked in a wheedling tone. “You have no idea how unhappy you made me.”

“When you value my life a little better than that of a rabbit!” she answered, in the same tone of utter scorn.

“I do not know what you mean,” he stammered with profuse apology. “The fellow who was so fortunately here just in the nick of time shall be rewarded. But it was an odd coincidence that one of the worst poachers in the neighbourhood, and the most insubordinate of all the fellows we have to deal with, should be the one to render us such a service.”

“Why should you drive him to be a poacher? Every Englishman should have enough to live on in the free

country in which he is born. Why let these poor fellows think that if it wasn't for the game laws none of them could starve," she answered, stung into angry speech, as he muttered in reply,

"A set of low rascals. Some of them always loafing about. A lot of the fences have been destroyed."

CHAPTER II.

OLIVE and Humphrey had been so far distanced by the terrified horse, that they never heard the full particulars of the danger to which Godwyn had been exposed, for the hurried explanations which they received when they came up to her conveyed but a faint idea of her own risk or the workman's bravery.

"How could you let the creature lead you such a dance? It was not like your usual pluck, my dear," was Olive's ready comment.

And Godwyn was again vexed with Humphrey, when, urged on by her scornful rival, he made an allusion to the poaching propensities of the rascal who had stopped the horse.

“As for his mettle,” he said detractingly, “courage is cheap in England, you know.”

To be sure there was a comical side to the adventure, but it was difficult for the girl to help feeling a little angry as they rode home more silently than they had come.

“It would be useless to appeal to any one here to protect me from Mr. Hayden,” she thought, beginning for the first time to be discontented with her surroundings, and to reflect that the only good which could result from a disagreeable experience would be that her tormentor might have the

grace to keep away from her in the future.

But in this hope she was doomed to be disappointed, for on the following day, just as business hours were over, she met the man whom she would have walked miles to avoid near the house, and found that he seemed only to have taken courage from her attempts to snub him.

"I hope you are no worse for the fright of yesterday," he said. "I assure you I never spent such an unpleasant time in my life. Why you should risk a life so precious by such carelessness I can't think."

He attempted to throw immense respect into his manner as he made this speech, and was neither intimidated nor disconcerted by her look of repugnance.

“What am I to do if he will put himself into such an absurd attitude?” thought Godwyn in desperation.

But before she could answer him, a crowd of men who were returning from the works came tramping past them, fine fellows some of them, with powerful, well-knit frames, whilst others were bent or gaunt—the victims of low diet and strong water—and most of them had features hardly handsome, if judged by the strict laws of symmetry, yet not unpicturesque in spite of their dust-discoloured garments, with their manly bronze. Among them came Ned Carlake, with a more defiant look than usual on his parted lips.

“Look out!” cried Mr. Hayden sternly; “can’t you see you are covering the lady with a cloud of dust?”

“The lady does not mind it in the

least; and the dust must be in Mr. Hayden's imagination," laughed Godwyn merrily, nodding to Carslake as they passed, with a brighter smile than she had ever accorded to the manager, and a look which said, "I have not forgotten what you did for me yesterday."

Mr. Hayden knit his brows, and said, as the men passed,

"That fellow's manner is most distasteful. He is not ashamed of himself in the least. I believe he actually pretends he has a right to the game he shoots on Mr. Bardsley's preserves, just as his old mother used to steal the wood, and maintain that the Almighty made the timber grow for them. From what you said yesterday, you appear to be acquainted with these radical notions amongst some of the men which lead

them to criminality. Ned Carslake, for instance, is a sort of stump orator, but a very inferior workman."

"It appears to be your way to complain of the general incapacity of your subordinates, and yet not to give them pay enough to keep their families," she answered, quickening her pace. "It seems to me that poor Ned Carslake should not be so severely blamed for having hazy notions about the strictly-guarded preserves where the pheasants and partridges fare more sumptuously than himself."

"Don't be so bitter," he remonstrated, noticing that her hands were clenched, and that her soft eyes flashed defiance in a way that was decidedly unpleasant. "There ought to be an Act of Parliament to prevent men with small incomes from burdening themselves with families."

She still walked on with quickened pace, obliging him to follow her, as he said,

“ You are not going again to that miserable cottage? You risked the infection there with your usual recklessness. But your health is too valuable to be perilled by constantly coming in contact with what must be so loathsome and offensive to you.”

“ Anything which God made can never be loathsome,” she answered, stopping in her rapid walk and facing him. “ But He did not make disease, and I mean to battle with it. I warn you that in future I mean to attack the cause, instead of hammering away at mere results. Look to it, Mr. Hayden, if you are not doing your best !”

In another moment she had fled from him, leaving him not so indifferent to

her brusque, plain speaking as he affected to be. The false ring of his voice was still in her ears; his familiar and flattering language had become more and more offensive to her; but the poor girl, who had no mother, kept her own counsel, little guessing that Mrs. Neale was making herself merry over her supposed liking for the prosperous manager, and that Mrs. Melksham was remarking that very morning on the fact that there "was no difficulty in penetrating the thin pretences with which Wynnie tried to veil her little love affair."

Godwyn was resolute on one point, that something must be done for the poor neglected souls who had hitherto been left to struggle towards the light as best they could. It was true, as she had hinted to Mr. Hayden, that all humanity was sacred to her; nothing was common

or unclean to her amongst her fellow-creatures.

She had hope of reaching the Dornton heathen through attention to their bodily comforts, and had already proved herself of sterling metal wherever there was woe or suffering. But when she appealed to the good-natured clergyman, whose admirers said that he was many-sided, but whose enemies declared that he had no deep spiritual convictions, and that his "moderation" was only another name for neutrality of feeling, he answered,

"It is a pity; but you see this is only an outlying suburb. We do everything that is possible, but my own health has failed, and I cannot afford to keep a curate."

"Cannot *I* do something?" she asked a little desperately, thinking of the thrift-

less human beings whose brains were sometimes clouded with strong drink as well as with care, and whose lives had become occasionally almost too hard for them to bear.

“We cannot all have our mission,” he answered a little uncertainly, thinking hopelessly of the attempt to let in Gospel truth to those cabins in which hinds pigged, with their wives and families. “I am afraid, my dear, it would not be quite the thing for a young lady.”

She looked at him archly, and questioned,

“A placid, inactive, pussy-cat sort of existence—is that supposed to be solely womanly?”

“Don’t let us argue,” he said. “The weather is hot, and there is something very heating, literally, in argument. I always avoid argument, for my expe-

rience is that neither disputant gains an inch more of the ground."

"I didn't argue. I merely asked if I could do anything."

"You can't be a clergyman."

"Nor a clergywoman," she answered, smiling, yet feeling as if she had wasted some precious hours in an imaginary difficulty. "But I can work for all that, and I have made up my mind I can't let this state of things go on."

"I am afraid you have rather an undisciplined mind," said Mrs. Melksham when she made the same remark to her.

"It's a rum lot you are going among," remarked the old gardener at the manor-house, dissuasively, when she asked him to help her to make arrangements for meeting the men on the following Sunday afternoon.

Nevertheless a vacant cottage was engaged, and thirteen recruits presented themselves on the first occasion.* Godwyn led a little service for them with blushing cheeks, but she gained courage as she proceeded. Her woman's voice, with its tender home-tones, gained on them, and on the following Sunday she found the room filled to overflowing. Her music proved to be a great assistance whenever her nervousness got the better of her.

On such occasions she sang simple hymns to her congregation, and delighted the men by teaching them to sing themselves. At the conclusion of the service she would "talk to them," as she called

* In the year 1877, when I was preparing this story for a magazine, my attention was drawn to some papers by Miss Ellice Hopkins, then appearing in another periodical, on "Work amongst working men at Cambridge," and I found that her facts were more wonderful than my fiction.

it. No one hurt her feelings by calling the talking "preaching," but somehow, when she finished what she had to say, there would be scarcely a dry eye in the room.

The work on the Sunday was followed up by a night-school for the men and boys who wished for it—in which Godwyn set herself to teach the adults as well as the children to read and write—and by fresh attempts to brighten up the houses and help in turns the wives and little ones. Her sympathies were so fine and her nerves so firm that the women learnt to depend upon her wherever there was sickness and distress, and where her presence could control the useless clamour of untutored grief. No wonder that Godwyn's hands were soon full enough, but somehow she seemed to thrive on it. That which might have

overworked a more feeble frame proved only a healthy exercise to her.

Meanwhile her constant absences from the house, and the little which his heir saw of his ward, began to worry old Mr. Bardsley. He longed to have more of the young fellow's confidence, and thought it hard that he should keep all his plans to himself, as if they were veiled in unfathomable mystery.

"If you wish to secure a treasure you should be more diligent in the wooing," he said, speaking plainly to his nephew one evening. "There is much in that girl. You have never guessed it, but *I* have always known it. She has nothing in common with mediocre people. Don't listen to your Aunt Laura if she advises you to slight Godwyn."

"If she gives me bad advice, does it

follow that I must take it?" answered the young man with a grim smile which was not devoid of humour. He could not endure to be thus addressed on this sacred subject.

His apparent coolness nettled Mr. Bardsley, who continued, in an offended tone,

"Young girls take fancies into their heads. Godwyn is good and beautiful, like her mother. But take my word for it, she will be difficult to win, and she will never marry without her guardian's consent."

"I daresay not. She is unlike other girls."

"All the better. It will be a variety."

"But a fellow may not be prepared to risk a refusal."

It so happened that Godwyn, tripping to her uncle's sanctum to say "good

night" to him as usual, the door being ajar, overheard, most unintentionally, a part of this conversation.

At the first sentence of the dialogue which reached her ears she was struck dumb, and felt as if she were powerless to move, whilst an idea flashed through her brain which made her grow suddenly faint. At the thought that Humphrey really loved her, and that Mr. Bardsley knew it, her heart had leapt up in her breast; but at the answer which the young man made, before she could recollect herself and have time to retire, this first idea was corrected by the horrible surmise that her guardian was trying to force her on his reluctant relative.

The coarse directness of the suggestion that Humphrey should exert himself to win her for his wife seemed not only

to be incongruous with what she knew of Mr. Bardsley's character, but vibrated on a sensitive chord that had hitherto lain hidden and unsuspected in her nature. There was a big remonstrance surging up in her soul, and almost tempting her to sacrifice conventionalities and confront the two men, telling them indignantly what she had overheard.

“O that he would hold his tongue! He does not know what he is talking of! Is he blind or deaf, that he does not notice the things which are passing before his eyes?” she said to herself, with a heart that still beat as if it would force its way through the flesh as with an effort at self-control she escaped to her own bedroom. “I used to think that Humphrey cared for me, but now I know that he will marry Olive. As if

it mattered half so much whom he marries as his rejecting the task which would have made him rise to things higher and nobler! As if it mattered what becomes of *me*! He was to be more diligent in the wooing; as if it were not much more important that he should be diligent in other things!" she repeated after a few moments, breaking into a half-humorous sob of wonder and pain as the stupid words, which had been torn from their context, kept buzzing in her ears, like flies on a window-pane. "I wonder if he will be docile and do what he is told. He used not to be obedient when he was a boy. Poor Humphrey! he need not be diligent; I will save him the trouble. But they might have saved *me* the insult. I am wicked to think like that. But my work is cut out for me—I shall never marry."

CHAPTER III.

FOR the next few weeks Godwyn kept more than ever "to herself," as old Betsy phrased it. She lived her life, and the Neales and Mrs. Melksham lived theirs—separate lives, which no longer touched in the strongest interests. The punishment of absenting herself from the amusements at the manor-house was not very great to Godwyn. And though, when she thought of the words which she had so unfortunately overheard, the blood quickened in her veins, and seemed to tingle to her finger ends, though she felt

the supposed humiliation with all the freshness and acuteness of youth, and with an exquisite sensitiveness in her first suffering which surprised her, still it was well for her that she had noble occupations and resources to fall back upon. Nothing could interfere for long with the healthy pulsing of her young heart.

If the revelation of the true nature of her feelings towards Humphrey startled and shamed her at first, and if it was painful to be forced to meet him with a new and more indifferent manner which she forced herself to assume, trying not to seem any more to him than a commonplace acquaintance, still the nature of the overwhelming work which she had undertaken left her no time for regret. She had only her own pocket-money to spend on the task which she had set to herself, and a nature less energetic and persever-

ing than hers might well have been paralysed at the work which lay before her, with no one to help her.

She had once thought of appealing to Humphrey at least for pecuniary assistance, but now she dismissed the idea as out of the question.

“He would rather pick up a pretty girl’s glove than help me to raise a withered or degraded woman,” she thought with a touch of involuntary vexation. And yet she sorely needed help.

For though at her first meetings the men who came were, if ignorant, yet orderly and devout, so that her own brothers could not have been more careful and reverent of her in their behaviour, yet now some of the rougher characters, against whose lawlessness she could only oppose her own weakness, talked of coming for a lark, and she had to face them.

Why she should care about such things, as trying to teach them, the men themselves could hardly understand, but there was an eagerness and earnestness about her which startled some of them.

“Will you do something for me?” she asked in her gentle voice of one of the worst of these men, who had hitherto spent his time at the public-house. “I want you to try and keep order for me to-morrow.”

“Blowed if I won’t, Miss,” he answered, resting his chin on his grimy hand, and for the first time he was on his honour not to get drunk. He was a powerful fellow, strong as a prizefighter, and made an example of the first hinderer of the peace who ventured to interrupt the proceedings with such exclamations as “My eye!” “I’m blest!” by placing a grasp as of iron on his shoulder and keeping him

swaying to and fro under the pressure of his right hand, whilst he warned him, "Ye'll wait for yer crack, my lad. Be careful not to speak disrespectful."

Godwyn was rather frightened of this sort of intervention, so that on another occasion, when she heard that there was some idea of getting up a row, she decided on taking the responsibility on herself, coming in, shaking hands with those nearest to her, and with a beaming smile, her first words being,

"See, I am not afraid of you; I heard that you meant to be rude and noisy, but I have come to trust myself with you—you have always been as polite to me as any gentlemen."

Amazement and bewilderment took possession of the would-be brawlers, and from that time, though she was backed up by no authority, the humanising in-

fluence prevailed. As that humanising influence proceeded, it was ludicrous to see the attempts which some of the men made to put on Sunday attire.

“ I han’t got a bran-new-fashioned ’un,” said one of them, in anxious apology for the peculiarity of his habiliments. “ I thowt as mebbe, Miss, you’d excuse this swaller-tailed ’un ; I han’t had courage tew go tew cherch in it.”

“ As if God minds your clothes ! He wants *you* in your old jacket,” she responded with her ready smile.

“ Ah, but the lads mak’s mock at us,” chimed in another old drunkard, who regularly took his clothes out of pawn every Saturday night on purpose to attend the meetings, in which, though she would not force the pledge on them at once, she spoke to them plainly of the sin of drunkenness.

“It’s along o’ thet cider bein’ give tew us in part o’ wages. The chaps don’t care for’t at first, and then they gets tew like it,” explained another; and this was indeed the great difficulty which prevented her from having recourse to teetotalism, and did not leave her much to answer, when another whined out,

“I doont mean it, but it’s along o’ thet ould devil; he gets the bettern o’ me. I shall never be shut o’ him till the grave’s diggit fer me.”

In spite of her horror of Mr. Hayden, she began to wish she could speak to him about this habit of doling out cider in her uncle’s name to the men in part of wages. But the courage which she had tried to screw up disappeared when on one of the narrowest paths on a part of the cliff, just as she was turning a corner on returning from one of her meetings, the man she so

disliked came sharply upon her—so sharply that she could almost have cried out as he baffled her in her intended spring on to the turf to elude his gallantry.

“No you must not—it is dangerous there,” he said, putting out an arm with the pretence of supporting her, and smiling with satisfaction as if he thought he had done her a service.

“Let us put matters straight at once,” he continued, with the mild swagger of authority which came natural to him, but which he had never before ventured to adopt in her presence. “Give me leave to protect you. I am frightened about all this psalm-singing. Do you know you are teaching some fellows who are constantly the worse for liquor?”

“I know they are occasionally capable, like Cassio, of ‘talking fustian to their own shadows,’ but so are some other

people," she answered, half beneath her breath. "You need not be alarmed; they are perfectly respectful to me."

"Did you ever hear," he added, in a mysterious voice, "of a tragedy which was enacted in those very haunts—when you were at school? how a helpless woman was murdered there, and how some of the very fellows you teach stood by, without interfering, to see her kicked to death?"

"Yes, I *did* hear," she said, with a half shudder; "it was a shocking story. It was in a fit of jealousy—the husband was drunk—and they said he really cared for his wife and suffered horrors of remorse before he was hung. Don't you think it proves all the more how terribly they need teaching?"

"Proves indeed! but *you*, the value of whose life is so—so inestimable—would you expose yourself recklessly to the same awful fate?"

“You talked to me once before about being reckless. But it seems to me the recklessness is theirs who give strong drink to these poor fellows. Do you mean,” she added with a laugh which she could hardly prevent, “that I am exposing myself to the probability of being kicked to death?”

“Ah, you may laugh, but worse things than that have happened. To risk your life with them is madness—infatuation!”

Her manner suddenly changed.

“You are talking nonsense, and you know it. But even if it were true, would it not be better that I should expose myself to the infinitesimal chance than that their wives and sweethearts should be left to encounter it always?”

“You are determined, then—let me help you. Give me a right to protect you, I will accompany you to all the meetings.

I—I would lay down my life for you ; you shall do what good you like. I will help you to do it. I will see with your eyes—if you will be—my wife,” he said, suddenly paling, and losing a little of his fluency, as he stood before her, barring her passage, and making the request which so appalled her.

“Let me pass, Mr. Hayden—let me go. Why do you stop me? Why do you insult me?” she asked, all her old horror of him gaining on her, in spite of her better self, at that moment.

He had plenty of confidence in himself, and that was an admirable preservative of temper, but it was this very confidence which incensed her.

“It is a strange sort of insult,” he answered with a little irony, “to pay you the compliment of asking you to be my wife. I will not press you—I will not

urge you. I will wait for some more fitting opportunity. But I cannot help fancying that when you have taken time to think of—of *all the circumstances*—you may make me a more satisfactory answer.”

“I—I beg your pardon if my answer was rude; but it never can be different,” she panted, with burning cheeks, thinking to herself, “What does he mean? Does he hint at the circumstances which I never understood when I was a child? Does he imagine it is only a question of time and opportunity, and I ought to be thankful to the first man who is pleased to take me?”

He raised his hat and passed on, not altogether ill-satisfied with the interview. He would not “press her,” as he had said, he would leave her plenty of time to calm down. He would be very wary—

very judicious, and would not persecute her with his attentions ; but he felt pretty sure that after due reflection she would be sensible enough to see the advantages of the home he offered her.

“She is very sensible—quite the most sensible girl I have ever met with—in spite of her enthusiasms, which will tone down with years,” he said to himself, with a smile, as he walked on, little guessing that the sensible girl was saying to herself in her turn,

“How cleverly he did it ! There is more lack of conscience than of brains in his case, if I read his character rightly ; but ah, how much finer a thing conscience is than brains !”

The western sky was aflame, with no watery tints, but brilliant burning tones of red and amber, as she returned to the house. She had to pass through a wood,

where a little burn went wimpling down to the sea.

The wood was close to the grounds of the manor-house, and it did not seem at all strange to her that Humphrey and Olive Neale should be sauntering together through it as she came by. All the womanly tact which was called up, when her powers of endurance were put to the test, was needed for her to say a few cheerful words to them as she met them. Humphrey had begun to puzzle himself a good deal as to why she passed him so often, now, with quick tread and commonplace sentences.

The familiarity of their childhood had always prevented him from paying her that special deference to the sex which is unpleasantly suggestive of a concession made to weakness, and with which

he treated Olive and Christine, but he had begun to look upon her with a new sort of unconscious reverence. He had heard of all she had been doing in the village.

It seemed startling and abnormal to him at first that a mere inexperienced girl should not only be able to come in fearless contact with these rough people, but should succeed in lifting them from degraded depths to the heights of divine love. He had refused to attempt the task himself, and now she had taken it in her own white fingers. He began to be a good deal ashamed of himself, and the shame was not a pleasant sensation. He was half angry with Godwyn for having made him experience it. But if he had made a false step it was too late to retrace it, and hers was, at any rate, the work of

an angel of mercy; he did not feel called upon to stop it.

On the contrary, he thought he should like to know more about it; and after turning it over a good deal in his mind he determined to be present at her next Sunday's meeting. It cost him an effort to go, but he made a sacrifice of his pride. He had no idea how much he should disconcert her by the course he had decided to take, though he thought it would be as well to keep his intended visit to himself. But at the sight of him, disguised, as if he were acting charades, in a working man's costume, with a pair of green spectacles on his eyes, as if he had been breaking stones on the road—although he stood well behind so as to be half-concealed by the crowd of heads—her voice shook with the effort which she made to control her

laughter. The memory flashed upon her of Humphrey's escapades in boyhood, and it was only by a vehement struggle that she managed to keep her gravity.

She spoke at first mechanically, and when she knelt down for the usual extempore prayer she was aware that besides suffering from her unfortunately keen sense of the ridiculous, she could not forget her unaccustomed listener, and she was ashamed of being self-conscious and miserably nervous.

"Somehow, Miss," remarked one of the simplest of her congregation to her afterwards, "that warn't in yer 'customed way. It didn't seem nat'ral-like prayin'."

"Oh, Humphrey, it was too bad of you," she said as he met her, looking as

usual at the door, in no way touched by his evident eagerness to accompany her home. "You must have known that I did not want you to break in upon us at all, still less to disguise yourself. What have you done with the clothes?"

"Macarthy lent them to me. I cocked them on over my others. You can't think how he entered into the joke."

Macarthy was an odd-looking man, with a face like a Bardolph, and the wag of the neighbourhood.

"That accounts for your looking so fat. But is that how you try to help me, Humphrey—turning my poor little efforts into a joke—when you must know it is difficult enough for me already to manage Macarthy?"

"Upon my word I was in sober earnest.

I never was farther in my life from turning anything into a joke. I can understand now how you make those fellows blubber over their sins. It half comes from having such pathetic tones in your voice. Dr. Johnson was never so far out as when he compared a woman preaching to a dog standing on its hind legs."

"Ah, you see, you are laughing at me still. I should not preach to them, as you call it, at all if there were a man to talk to them."

"Well, and to do you justice, 'preaching' is the wrong word. You don't come to them with long words—or—or—orthodox phraseology."

"What am I to do? It is not that I object to what you call 'orthodox phraseology,' but that they have never been taught. I am obliged to go back to the very A, B, C, talk to them as if I were a

child, and pray God to teach *me*. They are some of them so shrewd and sceptically inclined, in spite of their want of education, that I found it was perfectly necessary to make a clean sweep in the beginning of theological words, which they could not understand, and which would only set them arguing. I don't even inquire into their manner of life. Sometimes they bring me tales about each other, but I never listen to them. I only tell them of the Healer, who came to set them free from the misery of their lives, I trust to Him to do the rest—and already—already—I find they are growing ashamed of their own low type of manhood.”

She spoke rapidly in a lowered voice, as if she wished to dismiss the subject as referring to herself, and did not suppose he could take any interest in it, and also with that extreme objection to talking of the

things which lay nearest to her heart which is characteristic of some of the most earnest natures.

It was not as if she made pretence at an indifference which she did not feel, he caught himself thinking, but that she really *was* indifferent to him. In what tones of loving kindness she had spoken to those poor outsiders, and yet she did not vouchsafe to *him* the merest crumbs of comfort. How could he make love to such an icicle?

"Yours is not one of the theological guns that are always ready to go off, and invariably miss fire," he said, in truth scarcely heeding whether he talked gibberish or not, as he hit off the heads of the flowers with his walking-stick, a little pugnaciously. "By-the-by, does that fellow Carslake ever come to these prayer-meetings of yours?"

“Only now and then. He was very discouraging at first, and told me I was to leave him and his mates alone; they were ‘born in the mud, and were formed to live in it, like fishes in the water.’ I took that for what it was worth—only bitterness. But on one of the occasions when he came—rather surlily—he did me good service by putting down the only man that prides himself on being an out-and-out freethinker, and who can talk glibly when he likes. He made him understand, better than I could, that it was only a blockhead who could call prayer a mere mechanical matter. Carslake has books, and he has taught himself to read. He has a way of doggedly hiding his improvement, but he *is* much improved and is cleverer than the rest. I remember, during that argument, he had a look in his face as if he were trying to

think the thought out, even when he was giving imperfect expression to it."

"He is a sort of leader amongst the workmen. Have any reports ever reached you about an intended strike?"

"Once or twice," she said hesitatingly, "I have heard voices in high altercation, and they have said things which you and Mr. Hayden ought to hear; and once I heard Mrs. Carslake haranguing them, and saying, 'She have only been a-decaivin' of ye—it's their hobject to decaive ye—through her.'"

"Poor old Mother Carslake! They look askance at her—some of them—as if they thought their ancestors would have ducked her for a witch."

"I believe she likes to humour them in the illusion. You know that black pool, about a quarter of a mile above the church, which used to be the 'Witches' Pool?"

Mrs. Carslake hovers about it on purpose, and keeps up the tradition that the birds will not fly over it, nor the sheep drink of it," answered Godwyn, forcing herself to talk, just as if her pulses were not beating more rapidly than was comfortable.

"They are a queer lot for you to go so freely amongst. You have been very independent lately. I am afraid you are growing a bit of a democrat."

"No, I am not a democrat," she answered archly, "I would raise up instead of pulling down; but it is hard to expect virtue from people whose lives are one round of toil which we do not dream of exercising ourselves. I am not a democrat, but I don't see that what you call the higher classes are always much better; the women do not drink, and the

men do not swear, but they may be just as selfish and self-indulgent."

"That sounds like a home thrust."

"I did not mean it for a home thrust, but if I see ignorance, poverty and misery all around me, I must do what I can to help."

"But you don't know the temper of some of these fellows. Do you remember my offering always to take care of you in these walks of yours to the village?"

"I don't think there is any fear of my coming to much harm. I believe I know pretty well how to take care of myself."

"What, if the men are disaffected, as you admitted just this moment yourself?"

"I did not say that they are disaffected *now*. I might have said that I guessed there *was* some thought of striking for higher wages when I first went amongst them. I tried to tell

Mr. Hayden something about it, and he said they had better not; it would only compel him to substitute more machinery—and you know now that they make a good deal of the hand-labour paper. But all seems quiet at present.”

“And I have to thank *you* for the improvement,” he said with a gleam in his usually languid eyes which made her heart give a sudden throb. “I have long wished to thank you for the good you have been doing to our men. It is a pity that all the teaching should be kept for outsiders. I was despising these fellows for their dirt and coarseness, and forgetting the soot which enters into a man’s soul. Cannot you teach *me* too?”

She could not tell whether he were really in earnest or not; he had always seemed to her to be a little too sarcastic to be tender or reverential. The

heat of the evening had been almost unendurable, the sun's rays having scorched the parched earth during the day, and the air being still and close, so that Godwyn was conscious of being miserably hot and uncomfortable, as she cast about in her mind for words in which to answer the puzzling question.

"No doubt he is trying to please his uncle," she reminded herself, as she looked up, and noticed that a small black cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, had begun to spread from the horizon, and that a sort of purple veil was beginning to swathe the distant landscape, as if in wreaths of mist.

"Anything will be better than this suffocating *tête-à-tête*," she thought, as the first few sullen drops of the ap-

proaching thunder-shower gave her an excuse for hurrying on without answering his question. In another minute or two a breeze sprang up, which began to moan over the sea, the rain fell in torrents, and the lines—surging and swelling, heaving and flowing—of the hills and woods were blotted out as if they had never existed.

“I am so glad I came to meet you. I should have been miserably anxious about you,” said Humphrey’s voice, near at hand, as he unfurled an umbrella and held it over her head.

“How stupid of me not to bring a waterproof!” was all she could answer as she hurried on, the rain stinging her face, and a steam rising from the ground which hid the pathway and made her stumble, hurting her ankle.

“It is of no use for you to be so independent; the forces of Nature are rather terrific sometimes,” he said, drawing her arm within his, as a sudden flash of lightning lit up the cliffs, and showed them that they were close to a little cavity in one of the rocks, familiar to both of them, in which it was possible to crouch down and wait till the fury of the storm should be somewhat spent.

Flash after flash came the lightning, swifter and more vivid, the rain fell in turbulent rivulets, and the wind had risen to a shriek. But both of them were too strongly moved to think of the possibility of personal danger. There were full-toned and melancholy chords in the symphony of the tempest which seemed to be in harmony with Godwyn's mood, while Humphrey no longer cared

to hide the fact that behind the pleasant manners and placid face which hid him from his fellow-creatures an inward struggle had been going on.

They talked as they might have talked ten years before. And when the storm had so far ceased that it was safe to emerge from their shelter and set out on their way home, Godwyn took courage to say, as she might have said had she been ten years younger,

“Ah, charity, that is all very well, but justice should come in such a case before generosity. You should dispense the *right* sort of charity yourself, instead of trusting to the manager, who——”

“Who,” he interrupted, “is certainly not one of Nature’s nobles. I have thought so once or twice myself.”

“If you think so,” she exclaimed, forgetting herself as she became excited—“if you are sure that you are wasting your greatest blessing, time, by acting this farce of a gentleman at ease—why not confess it before all the world, and stick to it boldly? Your life is surely your own to use?”

His face twitched a little as he drew himself up, but he was not angry with her. He looked at her with the gleam in his eyes no longer faint, but blazing up, as in his boyhood, bright and clear.

“Then *you* must help me to use it,” he said; “but lately you have chosen to misunderstand me. It gives a fellow a stab to be left out in the cold, like being tossed about in a shipwreck, and looking at the lights ashore.”

She heard him with the tell-tale heart which again seemed suddenly to leap into her bosom, and with a gleam of consciousness which might have helped her to unravel the entangled skein, and to see clearly into the true explanation. But in another instant there came a rapid revulsion of feeling. She recalled the conversation she had overheard, in which the uncle had tried to force her on his unwilling nephew.

“He is doing his best to play his part,” she thought. “And perhaps, even if he were to marry Olive, he might care sufficiently for me to enter into a sort of Platonic friendship. But those things never answer.”

“It is almost mocking me to talk about *my* help, you who are so much more influential,” she answered, rather chokily. “I wanted you to think of the

lesser wrong inflicted on the poor, and the greater wrong which you bring upon yourself, if you will persist in ignoring your own dependants as if they were clods of the earth. And then you try to turn our conversation off to—to—— Do you know, I should have said you were the last man in the world to talk about being out in the cold?"

They were nearing the house, and any further conversation was stopped, as messengers came out to meet them, sent by Mr. Bardsley, who was anxious about Godwyn.

"Make haste and take off those wet things; the sooner you are rid of them the better. They shall send you some hot wine and water to your bedroom," said the old man, who had descended from his room in his anxiety about

the thunder, as the wet drip from the girl's garments left a track on the carpeted hall.

CHAPTER IV.

THE evening was beautiful after the storm. Mrs. Melksham and Mrs. Neale lingered about later than usual, walking on the terrace with Mr. Bardsley and admiring the exquisite sunset tints till the faint opal and mother-of-pearl melted into darkness, and the "raven down" of night began to gather towards the horizon. Godwyn was glad of an excuse for keeping her room and not seeing Humphrey again that evening.

Her bedroom was next to Olive Neale's

in that wing of the house, the roof of which had been considerably raised when the alterations were made, and which was nicknamed by Mr. Bardsley the "Maiden's Wing." Christine's little nest was on the floor beneath them, one story higher than the apartments from which Humphrey had rescued Godwyn in her childish sorrow. That apartment was now used as a sort of office for the safe keeping of certain chests and papers supposed to relate to Mr. Bardsley's affairs, and in this latter room the old man would be closeted about once or twice a year with Mr. Hayden for the transacting of "mysterious" business with the manager.

Olive came, as her habit was sometimes, to comb her hair before going to bed, with some accompanying chatter, in Godwyn's premises, and

Godwyn was vexed with herself for a feeling of almost exasperation at the sight of the beautiful apparition looking at itself in the mirror with so much satisfaction. The hair, "black as ash-buds," and the eyes, "dark as pansies," had never looked more lovely than they did that night, whilst the light laughter with the stream of small-talk, flavoured as with piquant sauce by just such a dash of slang as could shape the speech into vividness without vulgarity, had never seemed so to irritate her nerves before.

"He loves her, and he shall marry her were there a hundred uncles to force his choice, but I wish she would not intrude herself on my privacy," sighed the girl as she leant over the window-sill when her visitor left, and tried to soothe herself by drinking

in the calm beauty of the lovely night.

“What have I to compare to her perfect features and her Hebe bloom?” she continued, pursuing her thoughts as she watched the lights put out one by one in the shadowy house, which was adjacent to the smaller wing, and thought how rambling the edifice was, and how dim and majestic the larger part of it looked in the mysterious gloom, with but the faint ray of an infant moon. Suddenly she turned her head, for close at hand was a sound of footsteps and a rustling among the leaves. Just at the same moment, from the church tower afar off, and hidden by the trees, came the striking of twelve o'clock, and beyond any doubt the figure of a man dressed in a long cloak, with hat drawn over his brows, passed quickly across the

plateau and disappeared behind the elms.

“I did not know Humphrey had such a long old-fashioned cloak,” was her first thought as she hastily drew in her head, winding up her loose hair with a face suffused with blushes, which she was thankful to think the darkness had covered. She extinguished her light with a second thought that it was only natural he should come to linger beneath Olive’s window.

“Perhaps the disguise has been arranged on purpose,” she reflected; so full of this leading idea that she never stopped to consider that the figure in the cloak had certainly not been as tall as Humphrey. “Whatever happens may I be kept from jealousy!” was the unuttered prayer with which she closed her eyelids, and was soon sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

A few hours afterwards she woke with a strange smarting of the eyes. A cloud of dusky red leaped up between her and the window. "Fire! fire!" cried a voice which was shaking with excitement, and Olive stood in her night-dress, with bare feet, by her side. She ran to the window and saw that the smoke beneath them had become red, that already it was writhing and twisting, and that flames were beginning to break from it shaped like the tongues of serpents.

"Fire! fire!" echoed voices beneath, but the smoke seemed to hide even the trees and the greensward, and she could not distinguish the human faces which were calling to them in such agony to warn them of their peril. For a moment she felt nothing but dumb wonder; her brain was so troubled that it

seemed impossible to distinguish where its confused fancies ended and reality commenced. Then came a passionate cry from Olive,

“They are leaving me here to die!” and the whole truth flashed on her. The lowest story of the separate wing was burning; the other two stories were still untouched, but they were supported as it were, on a pedestal of flames, and if the men beneath were to fail in extinguishing the fire, the flames must reach them by degrees, and nothing could save them. Godwyn had slept more soundly than Olive, who had been first roused by the sound of footsteps and voices calling to her from below, and who had dashed madly for the wooden staircase at the back of the bedroom, but had found that it had already become impassable.

She had never known how dearly she loved her life till then, when she seemed likely to lose it. How undesirable seemed a release from the pomps and vanities of the wicked world—how terrible the awful proximity of intense physical suffering! A faint sickly kind of dread overcame her.

“Oh, Godwyn! it is coming—death—*death!*” she shrieked.

Then a hand that was warm, firm, and strong, grasped hers. It was only that of a girl—a girl whom she had hitherto hated and despised; but the touch of it seemed like that of a guardian angel just then, and she clasped her hands over her heart—a little ashamed of her utter want of self-control—trying in vain to steady its tumultuous beatings.

“Godwyn, oh, Godwyn—do something,”

she groaned as she nestled closer, "you were always so clever—you can think of something."

"There is so much substantial stonework it will give them more time," answered Godwyn, scarcely recognising her own voice, as she glanced at the tear-bedewed, livid, and anguish-stricken features which in the uncertain light it was difficult to recognise as Olive's.

"Merciful Heaven!" shouted the girl, "how can you take it like that? Help! help! fire! fire! Oh, the heartless, unfeeling wretches! Is there no one to help! I am going mad! Are they all asleep? Will they leave us to die like rats in a trap?"

"Hush, hush! don't you remember there is Christine first? She is beneath us; she must be most in danger, poor

little Christine," answered Godwyn, soothing her. "If you scream so we cannot hear them; they are calling to us."

And true enough when they listened they could distinguish voices shouting,

"Are there no engines to be got?"

It was a woman's voice that uttered the cry. But a man's answered, and he seemed to gasp with dry throat,

"Not any nearer than Knaresbury."

"All the water in the house has been used already, and there is not a drop more to throw at the blaze, not a drop of water to be got," cried another, which was strained in its tones of anguish.

"They are gone for buckets to the

village all the lot of them as fast as their legs can carry 'em," answered two or three other voices, which the girls recognised as those of men from the paper-mills, for all the hands that could help at Dornton were there working their hardest.

And as now and then a gust of wind tore away a curtain of smoke revealing the terrible tongues of flame, which were already appearing from the lowest window and licking the stone wall with amorous fierceness, they could see these energetic fellows risking falling timbers and cracking beams in their fruitless attempts to climb up the burning staircase or to scale the walls, past the clouds of black smoke which were rising from the lowest story.

"What a good thing there is so little wind, and that all this stonework

prevents the flames from raging as they would do if the timber was dry ! The buckets are coming—it will soon be better,” said Godwyn, almost mechanically trying to encourage her fellow-sufferer, who, mad with terror, clung to her arm with a quivering grasp, fearing to faint and be insensible. Olive had ceased to rend the air with her piercing shrieks, but in the comparative silence which had followed there were other cries more inarticulate and heart-rending which Godwyn recognised as those of her little favourite, who stood at the window of the story beneath them wringing her hands in childish agony, as she, nearer by twelve feet to the awful embrace of death, watched the flames leaping greedily and springing to the ivy. The heated air, the bewildering light, the murmur of the

crowd, and the cries of agitated friends, only made the poor child lose the little presence of mind she had once possessed.

“A ladder! bring a ladder!” gasped her agonised mother, who had rushed to the scene of the accident, scarcely recognisable in her night attire, with her grey hair dishevelled and her face distorted in the light of the flames, yet grand in its suffering motherhood as she listened to her daughter’s wail of terror. “Is there no one to help—no one to take pity on her? How can you stand there staring? Have you the hearts of men?” she cried, redoubling her agonised appeals to the bewildered workmen, and raising her voice above the steady crack of the cruel flames. “My child was always delicate, easily frightened at anything. God of

mercy ! can you see her stand like that, the fire scorching her bare feet?" she cried, forgetting all her former self-possession, and pushing so determinately forward to the rescue, not listening to Humphrey's cautioning words, " You cannot do any good—you will only hinder," that her nervous impatience led to an unlooked-for disaster.

Too many willing helpers, stimulated by her eager commands, had pressed forward to the ladder, which proved, as it so often happens, a trifle too short to reach the window, and the ladder, which had hitherto been used only for gardening purposes, had given way under their weight.

" They will fetch a stronger and a longer one in no time from the mills," they had told the half-crazy mother, whilst she looked on and could do nothing,

revealing for the first time how ardently she loved her child.

“She could have leaped—she must leap *now*. The grass is soft beneath. It was monstrous of them to crowd the ladder!” cried the poor woman, with the weird light again revealing her features, distorted by the agony of her mind. “Horror! horror! the flames will reach her; she can bear it less than the others—she was always so delicate.”

“Leave her to *us*,” said a spectator in a warning voice; “she cannot possibly leap that distance; she will be safe until they fetch the ladder.”

But Mrs. Melksham did not heed him. What she saw was dreadful. The flames, as she had said, seemed to be nearing the little naked feet; they were crackling on the ivy, and it was in vain that

people with steadier heads were careful to point out to her how the greenery would burn slowly and the stone wall was yet intact.

“Christine, do you see *me*?” she called, trying with a great effort to calm her voice, as its echoes were flung up to the shrinking girl, who gave no sign of relief at hearing it.

Even when their glance under the awful circumstances was one of recognition, it was noticed that the sense of the mother's presence seemed to give no encouragement to the daughter. But the habit of obedience remained, and when the mother who considered her sole authority to be an exclusive right, uttered in a voice which made the bystanders tremble,

“Jump! I *command* you to jump! Jump! It is not so far as it looks, and

they will catch you," with one wild cry the girl flung herself down, missed her aim, and was carried insensible from the spot.

"*We cannot jump,*" moaned Olive, as, recovering herself a little, she looked from their comparatively inaccessible windows and heard the sound of crackling timbers, now mingling with the roar of the flames.

Help to be of any avail must come soon. The crowd beneath the window had steadily increased, and was swelled by the greatest murmurers amongst the workers at the paper-mills, a trial of this kind being the one most calculated to call out the better feelings of human nature. The men especially who had been gathered to Godwyn's classes, desperate at being able to do nothing, swarmed around the windows where, according to all human cal-

culation, the heat ought to have proved unendurable, some of them digging their nails in between the stones and attempting in vain to climb up the surface of the wall, whilst others clung to the ivy and fell back indifferent to burns and bruises. A fresh cheer had been raised when the buckets were brought from the village, but the conflagration swept on, scarcely retarded by the feeble jets of water.

Olive, now on her knees, clung to Godwyn, crying, "Mercy ! mercy !"

"Oh, Lord ! who knows how we grew'd up like the beestes that perish with no one tew care for our souls till she coom to taach us about our Father i' Heaven, help us," sobbed one poor fellow, indifferent to the bystanders, who heard his rude language, as he felt that his physical strength could do nothing, and heard the panes of glass

beginning to shiver in the room that had been Christine's.

The fire was creeping up slowly and surely. There was no longer any hope from the arrival of the engines, but suddenly there was a shout of "The ladder! the ladder!"

The men, who were carrying it with unusual agility, though a few of them were comparatively small and weak, had brought it from the paper-mills. Would this ladder be long enough to reach the extra distance? There was scarcely any hope of it.

"Stand back or you may break it!" shouted Humphrey's voice, as he stood waving back the little army of eager fellows, who but for his tones of authority would have crowded the rungs of the ladder directly it was grounded, possibly precipitating it into the flames. The men

had never seen him look at them with such an air of authority ; they hardly knew the young master in the man of granite who, with clenched teeth and set face, made them all fall back till the ladder was hoisted and it became apparent that the hoped-for communication could not, after all, be effected. For the ladder was but just long enough to reach to the second story, from which the ill-fated Christine had leaped, and which was now beginning to burn. But there were three stories to climb to rescue the imprisoned girls ; there seemed to be no conceivable way of getting at them.

The crowd was paralysed with horror, and the women began to sob loudly. Mr. Bardsley, who had kept up till now, utterly broke down. There would not be time for the firemen to arrive from Knaresbury, and the resources of Dorn-

ton appeared to be exhausted. It seemed as if human skill and energy could avail no more, and as if nothing could be done but to wait for the end.

“Silence!” shouted Humphrey, the pallor of whose face was terrible, to the weeping women. “Would you make them lose their courage when so much depends upon themselves. We shall save them yet.”

With the help of a few of the workmen he grounded the ladder, fixing it securely at a corner of the building nearest the house to which the flames had not yet spread; then, managing by a feat of strength to reach a window-sill of the adjoining house, and hanging to it by his arms, so as to balance himself, he called to Godwyn,

“Tear the sheets in strips, make a firm knot, fasten the knots round your waists, and lower yourselves from the win-

dows. You have time to do it properly."

Godwyn listened, her nerves strung to the utmost tension, and freeing herself by an effort from Olive's clinging grasp, said as she began to strip the bed,

"Get the scissors. I left them on the dressing-table yesterday; the right-hand side, nearest the door."

"Oh, I can't, I am too faint; the smoke would suffocate me," moaned the girl, who on other occasions had prided herself on her bold spirit, wringing her hands helplessly.

Godwyn had to grope for them herself, and her heart turned sick within her as the truth suddenly flashed on her that the maid must have moved them, and there was no time to search for them; but seizing the edge of the sheet with her

little teeth, she succeeded in making an incision in the edges of the linen selvage. The sound of tearing came next.

“What are you going to do?” asked Olive in a quivering voice.

“Can you tie a sailor’s knot?” she asked, never desisting from the work of rending. “Ah, you never played with boys. Humphrey taught me. There, tear this side, and we will knot the two ends together,” she continued, going on with her work as deliberately as if she were not standing face to face with death.

But Olive’s trembling fingers refused to obey her will, and Godwyn could not spare time to look round upon her. Everything depended on her nerve and eye—the position of her head never altered.

“The fire is gaining on us! there is no hope!” cried Olive excitedly, as she watched the work proceeding. “Oh, if I get free from this I will lead a better life.”

“Lord have mercy on us!” was the murmured answer, as Godwyn strained at the sheets and rent them, hardly conscious of her heroism, and what it cost her to practise it.

In another minute she was fastening the noose round Olive's waist, who, when the final moment came, shrank from looking down at the sight beneath.

“Don't look at it; don't think of it. See, I have fastened the knots securely, and Humphrey is waiting for you—in danger himself,” she pleaded, endeavouring to rally her companion's courage. “Now then, lower!” she

called distinctly, as the terrified burden was guided by her careful hands through the window, and received securely by the men beneath. Then there was a relaxation of Godwyn's muscles; she could hear her own beating heart, and yet she seemed to breathe more freely.

A sob was heard in the midst of the crowd; it came from Olive's mother, who received her child. The brave girl turned to renew her task. Again she had to tear the strips of linen, but her hand was less steady when she came to knot them. Would she have time? The flames seemed to be rising higher. The good sense, the composure, and the mere bodily strength which had helped her hitherto were suddenly breaking down. Her head was dizzy with the smoke;

the floor, she thought, would soon fall in. "What did it matter?" she was tempted to think, as a new feeling of inertia began to steal over her. The remembrance of the danger to which she had been exposed but a short time before crossed her mind at that moment, and she could not help thinking that perhaps it was a pity she had been rescued when her horse took fright. Yet perhaps this death would not be so terrible after all; she would soon be stifled, and then she should feel nothing more. Her final sacrifice was completed; she had restored the lovers to each other—what was there left worth living for?

A great shout arose from the crowd. Humphrey—who had been compelled to relinquish his painful position at the window, and was now standing with hair singed and face blackened

on the topmost rung of the ladder, hoping that his voice might yet reach Godwyn—peered with eyes which had been bleared and weakened through the smoke, and saw Ned Carslake, assisted by some of his comrades, and carrying something which looked like another ladder. Carslake, who belonged to the race of what Pindar called active athletes, seemed to be still inspired by that hope which is a more powerful motive than despair.

In all the attempts which had hitherto been made to rescue Godwyn from her perilous position, Ned Carslake had been foremost. It was he who had led the forlorn attempt to climb the perpendicular walls before any ladder could be procured. Doubled up, bent forward, blinded by the smoke, and yet persevering, with a pointed stick held be-

tween his teeth, to help him to make use of the smallest crevices in the stonework, clinging with the clinging power of naked feet, working himself upwards with bleeding knees and fingers thrust into every chance hole, the poor fellow had made most superhuman efforts, and yet had fallen back like the other men, helpless, with face scratched and clothes torn, desperate at the failure of his endeavours. For the crevices in the wall were not large enough, the restored stonework was too neat and even, and the ivy which had made indentures in the flatness of its surface had not sufficiently established itself to be of any use. Yet the crowd of comrades, who watched him, evidently believed in him, and hoped that some good might yet result from the energy of their mate. Even Godwyn, who

now heard the shout raised of "Carslake!" followed by a ringing cheer, was roused to listen and to wonder, though her breath was coming with such difficulty, and a red reflection had crept into the other side of the doomed room from the burning staircase behind it.

Meanwhile Carslake and his comrades had reached the adjacent house, and were climbing like cats to communicate with the young master. Their object was soon apparent; it was to fix the smaller ladder at an angle to the larger one, tying it with strong ropes which they had brought for the purpose. Humphrey immediately understood them, and though his own breathing was somewhat laboured he assisted them in tying the knots, giving his orders in a voice which was still clear, and as new to others as it was to himself.

When the communication had thus been established with the fated room the two men looked at each other, their figures seeming to the crowd beneath to stand out black against the orange and brilliant vermilion of the flames, with gorgeous specks like golden rain falling round them. Which of them should undertake to cross the smaller ladder, accomplishing the Blondin-like feat of balancing not only himself over it, but of returning laden with a double weight?

There was no time to hesitate. Humphrey, as he cast an unconsciously haughty look at his assistant, was instinctively reminded of Jem Wilson in Mrs. Gaskell's story, and determined to back his Oxford training against that of the nimble Hercules.

"Does the fellow think that he only can do things of this sort?" he caught

himself thinking a little scornfully as he said aloud in a tone of authority, "You will be suffocated by the smoke, Ned; you have lost blood already, and the air will revive you. Go down and leave the young lady to me."

It was impossible to disobey, and as the crowd watched him breathless with terror, Humphrey, balancing himself with his arms, proceeded steadily to cross the ladder. He too, like Ned Carslake, had been trained from boyhood, climbing the face of the cliffs in search of birds' eggs, and was, perhaps, as he had declared, the better fitted for the task, inasmuch as his muscles were not already fatigued. He passed on from rung to rung, with head erect and firm step, in full possession of his nerves, swaying his body a little forward, when at last he reached the window, and

carefully stepping from the ladder as he sprang through the narrow opening in aid of the expectant girl, who fell fainting as he came up to her. For an instant the awful darkness of the smoke enveloped them; the floor was already hot beneath their feet—in a short time it might fall in. That instant seemed ages to the anxious watchers beneath, and when Humphrey reappeared at the window bearing Godwyn's insensible form, it was too evident that his arms trembled with the unaccustomed weight, and that he hesitated to advance as he looked down at the sheer descent.

He who had not known fear for himself was as yet too unfamiliar with danger to be able to steady his nerves when he faced it for another. The slight ladder creaked

and seemed to sway in spite of the men who clung to the scorching wall and tried in vain to steady it by holding the lower steps when Humphrey with the added weight ventured his foot upon it.

“Don’t try it! Stay wher yew be! Pass the lady on first tew me!” shouted Carslake, who saw the difficulty, and, no longer deterred by commands, rushed forward from the crowd.

In another minute he was up stretching the length of his flexible body to its full extent, yet careful not to leave the highest step of the lowest and strongest ladder. And Humphrey stooped to meet him, no longer jealous of his aid, so that between the two men the rescue was accomplished, the girlish form being passed safely

and unconsciously from one to the other without the strain on the weaker woodwork which had been so justly dreaded.

CHAPTER V.

GODWYN'S fainting fit prevented her from witnessing the coolness and promptitude to which she owed the preservation of her life. One moment's hesitation and it would have been too late to save her from a fate of which it was impossible to think without shuddering. But Humphrey had proved himself to be man enough not to yield to emotion at a critical juncture. He was ever afterwards unable to recall the agony of feeling with which he had watched his old playmate making the

knot secure, fastening the rope safely round Olive's waist, and then lowering her companion slowly down to the solid earth, whilst thrills of horror had run through his veins as he thought of the further danger to which in her self-forgetfulness she had been exposed. And yet she had been unconscious of his loving, reverent care, as, not for the first time in her life, he took her in his arms, and there had been no opportunity for endearing words, the eyes had been blind and the ears had been deaf.

He was quite unconscious himself of the deplorable figure which he also presented, with face blackened and scorched and clothes singed, as he came down from the ladder. He had wrapped Godwyn's feet, as he lifted her up, in the cloth of his coat, and it was well he took

the precaution, for no one ever told her how a portion of her nightdress had been slightly charred as she was carried down the perilous descent. Fortunately for herself, she knew nothing of the agony of relief, the joy and the congratulations, or how the old man whom she called "uncle" had cried like a child when he folded his arms round the ward who was so dear to him.

It seemed difficult to believe on the following morning that what might have been a most direful tragedy had ended, after all, with a few ugly cuts and scratches, a few bruises and burns. The engines had arrived from Knaresbury in time to prevent the fire from spreading to the larger building, and the injury to property proved to be less than had at first been anticipated.

Mr. Bardsley, who at any other time

would have mourned over the destruction of that older part of the house which had always proved of interest to antiquaries, was now overwhelmed with thankfulness that there had been no loss of life. Certainly the doctors who had been called from Knaresbury shook their heads over Christine's case, and hinted at the fear of spinal injuries. But Mrs. Melksham was sure they were under some misapprehension, and that her daughter was merely suffering from nervous symptoms. As to Olive, there was but one opinion—that the young lady was only hysterical, and that time and careful nursing would soon restore her mind to its proper balance.

The overpowering horror and sense of helplessness, now that the danger was past, were already forgotten by her, but the effect on her nerves was not so easily

got rid of. She woke with sudden starts from uneasy slumbers, complaining of her horrible dreams.

“It is no time for remonstrating with either of them; I only wonder they are no worse,” said Mr. Bardsley, when he heard of the constant demand for harts-horn and smelling-salts.

He would not allow himself to express surprise even when he heard that Olive had insisted on seeing his nephew, little guessing how Humphrey had found himself in the uncomfortable predicament of being expected to soothe her with all sorts of sympathetic words, to which he feared she might attach a stronger meaning than he intended. Even when he uttered the words he felt himself to be a hypocrite, but what man could see a woman suffering and give rough answers to her almost tender questions?

“I am afraid she will not be exactly in a good humour when she hears that Godwyn is to be my wife; well, the sooner I can give that out as an established fact the better,” thought the young man, with a certain amount of irritation which was excusable, inasmuch as he too, according to his own view of the matter, “had borne about as much as any mortal could be expected to bear.”

There was no difficulty in speaking to Godwyn, for she had passed through the unusual trial in a way that proved, as Mrs. Melksham said, that she must be in a “vulgar state of health.” In her case there were no nervous crises, no scenes of excitement or despair. After the one fainting fit, from which she had been easily recovered, she had made herself useful as usual, especially in tending Christine.

The fire had scorched her; one hand had been slightly burnt, and it had been necessary to apply cooling plasters to one side of the brow. So that now and then when she saw Humphrey's eyes fixed on her more intently than usual, with a look that penetrated her uncomfortably, she flushed up at the thought that he was noticing the bandage; the time had long passed when such a look would have made her giddy with strange uncomprehended hopes.

On the second day, having spent some hours in tending Christine, she wandered out when the evening came, but only into the garden, and even in the garden she avoided any visit to the scene of devastation. She seemed, as Mrs. Melksham said, to be "very matter-of-fact," but in reality she wished to brace her nerves and avoid any unnecessary re-

membrance of the horrors of that memorable night. She was stooping over some flowers when she heard Humphrey's footstep, and, looking up, she was so surprised at seeing he had followed her that for the moment she turned paler than usual.

But soon the natural colour, no deeper than the faint pink on a transparent shell, returned to her cheek; for Godwyn, as her wondering friends had remarked, was in perfect health—in spite of the second alarm which, though they knew it not, had agitated her nerves—and as different from the delicate and feverish Christine as from the now excited and tearful Olive. But Humphrey noticed that her face was set with an expression of quiet resolution, and that she even turned it away from him when he ventured with a significant gesture to touch one of the

wavy locks which had escaped from her usually neat hair.

“ Yes—the fire singed it ; I have had to cut it—it is much shorter than usual,” she said with a bright smile, recollecting herself in another moment, and forcing herself to look suddenly back at him, letting him understand that she comprehended his almost involuntary action. “ The fire has left its marks also upon *you*.”

“ Oh, it is nothing,” he answered hastily, hiding an injured wrist with his sleeve. “ What would a man be worth if he could not bear pain ?”

“ I do not like you to have to bear it,” she said with a little sigh, as she thought “ he was hurt in saving *me*,” and the thought proved almost too much for her determined self-control.

“ You pay me an ill compliment. At that rate I should make a poor soldier.

How could I be a coward, even if Nature had made me one, when *you*, a girl, could face danger so bravely, and Olive Neale with all her shrieking and screaming illustrated the absurdity of getting a scare?"

"Don't speak so hardly," she answered tremulously, "I was desperately frightened myself, but then I——"

"Don't dread death like other mortals," he said, finishing her uncompleted sentence, less cynically than usual, his eyes watching the grave, steady, sweetness of her face. "Twice—twice—to think that owing to somebody's culpable carelessness you have been exposed to danger here where you should have been so cherished!"

She raised herself from the stooping attitude and looked still steadily at him as she replied,

"It was nobody's fault, only rather an odd coincidence—accidents they say never

come singly. But I have not thanked you properly yet, Humphrey, and I *do* thank you most heartily. Had it not been for your promptitude, your bravery, your helpfulness, I might not have been standing here this evening."

"It is very magnanimous of you to thank me, certainly, just as if I were a stranger, and did not set a peculiar value on your life. Do you not know how you are all in all to me? I think if you had not known it before you might have had no doubt about it that night," he answered, rather chopfallen at the matter-of-factness of her thanks.

She supposed it was a *façon de parler*, knowing, as she fancied she did, that it was on Olive's life he had set so unusual a value. And then she again remembered the conversation which she had overheard between him and his

uncle, and reminded herself that as a matter of course she must expect an appeal from him, and that it would be her duty to resist it. She knew what was coming, when a man would not have known it, and, sinking into a garden-chair that she might be the better able to bear it, pressed both her hands so tightly together that the nails almost entered into the tender flesh. He noticed the attitude, and continued with his voice so broken and his looks so eager, that she thought he was over-acting his part and was perplexed by it.

“ You know that I have well thought over what I am saying to you, therefore if I seem to take you by surprise may I entreat you to take time and not to give me your answer in a hurry, as it will be doubly painful for me to hear it from your lips, after the years we have known

each other, should it not be favourable?"

He paused. She felt emotion gaining on her, and was not sorry that he should be silent for some moments as if to give her an opportunity for recovering her calmness. She had moved her hands now and made a veil of them, so that he could not see the expression of her face, or the crimson messages sent by the blood to her cheeks, but he fancied that she shrank back from him into the farthest corner of the seat as he came nearer to her. Could it be possible that she recoiled from his touch?

"I love you," he continued in the voice which sounded so dangerously moved. "Godwyn, you would only laugh at me if I prepared elaborate speeches. I can think of no language more expressive than those three simple words. I can imagine no greater happi-

ness than that of calling you 'wife.' You have been remarkably silent lately, but you can answer me in three letters. Will you not give me that happiness?"

It seemed as if she tried to speak and could not articulate at first. The little hands writhen with pain were still veiling her face as the answer came hoarsely and abruptly at last, and was—simply—"No."

He felt troubled, though he thought she must be joking, in a way he could not at all explain. The negative was abrupt; it lacked her usual politeness, and though he could not suppose that she was in earnest, he was anxious, and felt a creepy, chilly sensation of fear at the thought that he had not chosen the proper time. He had certainly expected a different reception of his suit.

"I do not mean to agitate you," he began, "but — —"

“ But you are very good-natured and amiable to me ; I know all that,” she said, forcing herself to speak though the words seemed to come through a great lump in her throat. “ I am so much obliged to you, Humphrey, but I know also that you are obeying orders.”

So this was the explanation. He was glad, even in his misery, that she was raised beyond all suspicion—*she* had never plotted to win him. It was no ungoverned fancy of *hers* which had led his uncle to speak so tyrannically about the marriage. Indeed, it was rather to be feared that her determination might take the opposite direction, but surely so slight a girl could hardly have so much determination. He was not the sort of man to think that no woman could withstand his charms, but he could

hardly help knowing that Godwyn had always liked him.

For the first time he began to repent wasting his time on the handsome flirt who had come between them. Godwyn was not so handsome, but she was infinitely more lovely to him.

“Move your hands from your pretty face. Never mind the bandage. Look straight into my eyes with your bright clear ones, and see—do I look as if I am obeying orders?”

She *did* move her hands, showing the face which was so uncomfortably hot, while her eyes flashed with indignant pride as she said,

“Don't flatter me. You know I can never bear it, least of all at a time like this.”

“That is all fiddlestick,” he rejoined, losing his temper with unexpected and

boyish vexation. "As if one can go into enthusiasm over mountains and water, and pretend to despise the beauty of a pretty woman. I am not such a humbug. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'"

"There are others much more beautiful than I am," she answered in a low voice, terrified as she felt her strength diminishing and the mask which she had assumed beginning to weigh heavily upon her.

"Only for one moment," cried the voice of her heart, "only for one moment can you not yield and be natural?" "You wretched piece of weakness," answered the other voice within her, "have you not to think of Olive Neale as well as yourself? Would he *really* be happy if you let him from a sense of duty bind himself to *you*?"

“When I was a boy I used to call you my little wife. May I not call you by that dear name still?”

The beatings within seemed to stifle her own voice as she answered,

“When we were children we could play at these things, Humphrey, but now we have put away childish things. For my part, I see so much to be avoided in many people's married lives. The misery is so often greater than the happiness that it seems to me a very serious matter indeed. I know you intend to be very generous to me. You would not like to see me penniless and alone in the world, but don't be afraid; I have my music, and when the worst comes to the worst I can support myself. I rather like being independent. I do not see the necessity of marriage for happiness.”

This curious indifference to all that was valued by most girls nettled him, and he was more nettled than ever as she continued in the same tone,

“Were I to do you the injustice of marrying you, you might be unhappy, and I should never forgive myself.”

“You mean that *you* would be miserable. Say you do not mean it?”

“You need not use such strong words nor speak in that tragic tone, as though life and death hung on my answer,” she said in the voice in which a trained ear might still have detected a chord of agitation, but which sounded to him as if she were getting colder in proportion to his warmth. And in her nervousness she laughed—a laugh which sounded mockingly through

her efforts to keep the emotion out of it.

“Humphrey, had we not better talk about something else? Will you tell me what is to be done about those deeds and money-boxes which they say have been destroyed by the fire? Is uncle much troubled about it? Will it make *you* poorer?”

The evening shades were falling as he looked in blank astonishment at her profile neatly cut out against the dark background of the trees. Her character, he thought, was full of unexpected surprises, but he had not been prepared for this indomitable pride.

“I suppose,” he answered a little bitterly, “it would be useless to resent this arbitrary change of subject. But I give you up. I have done with you. You might have made anything of me. I

was as wax in your hands; but now, if it is any satisfaction for you to know it, if you wanted to sear my nature, you have done your best to sear and warp it. Go your way; I will go mine, but the day will come when you will regret it."

He spoke almost fiercely, and his face was not like hers in shadow, so that if expression meant anything, she could see that he was keenly disappointed, as he stood stiffly and awkwardly before her for one moment before he turned abruptly and left her. With that instantaneous sense of relief consequent on intermitting the watch over herself which had been so difficult to keep she attributed his disappointment to vanity—nothing more! And then, like a gleam of summer lightning revealing the distant landscape, the idea flashed upon her that

he *might* have been in earnest. Till then she had never thought it possible. She had been even a little sore at the suffering which he had caused her, and the unnecessary trial to which he had exposed her, but now she would willingly have called him back by a sign. She tried to make one, but he did not see her, and her voice was choked. Tears came into her eyes as she again hid her face in her hands and murmured,

“God help me to bear it if I made a mistake. They praise me for being brave twice when my life was in danger, and they do not know that in other things I am miserably weak!”

She had acted for the best, and yet that night her pillow was drenched with her hot salt tears as she passed the hours in torturing thought—thought

confused by the alternate "dip of opposite reflections," like the strophe and antistrophe of a chorus.

"I am so alone; my life may be so uncongenial," cried the one voice; and the other answered,

"If his love had been given to another, and I could not have the sparkle of the cup, would it have been well to submit to drink the dregs?"

At the one moment she was consoled by the reflection that she had taken rank amongst other women and was cleared from the reproach of giving her love unasked, since Humphrey had asked her to become his wife. But ever in the "inmost fold" of her reasoning she was sensible of irretrievable loss, and saddened by the knowledge of what "might have been."

"I must find my happiness in other

things. The delicious word 'home' will never be for me," she thought as she watched sleepless till the morning, and then again came the comfort, "Thank God he is more like what he used to be ! The promise of his boyhood may, after all, be fulfilled !"

CHAPTER VI.

GODWYN'S tonic was provided for her as usual in the care of other people, especially of the sick and suffering. She had not time even to visit the village, or to hear the various reports as to the origin of the fire, for Christine could scarcely bear her out of her sight. There were times when the delicate frame was racked with the acutest and most intolerable attacks of agony, during which she had asked Godwyn if it were wicked to wish that she might be abolished and

blotted out from existence—anything rather than to live in such utter pain!

“God is merciful, dear. He will not let you suffer more than you are able to bear,” whispered the soothing voice, trying to ease the terrified girl, whose hopes for the future had been darkened by the sternest dogmas of Calvinistic theology. But she shuddered when she thought of what Christine, who was so cowardly about pain, would probably be called upon to endure. For the real truth could no longer be hidden. There was something the matter with the poor child’s spine, engendered by that leap, or rather fall, from the window, and developing into serious disease. Mrs. Melksham had at first attempted to deny the possibility of this, but the suspicion deepened into certainty as day

by day Christine grew weaker and weaker, and it became impossible to move her from her bed. Godwyn was everything to her, but the sore, jealous feeling remained in the mother's heart.

"Oh, *I* darkened the room," Godwyn said in apology when Mrs. Melksham blamed her for interfering on the following day. "I knew she could never sleep without rest and darkness, and the doctors said she was to sleep if possible in the afternoon."

"Don't you know that the darkness is bad for her?" answered the mother. "Of course it makes her grow pale like a weakly plant in a cellar."

The cold answer stung the anxious nurse to the quick. It grieved her to see how slight and frail her girl friend began to look, how fearfully exquisite

were the new rose tints on her thin cheeks, and how feverishly bright her eyes. She was prepared for the worst, and was not surprised when, on a night or two afterwards, a message was brought to her in Mrs. Melksham's name to ask her to come to her daughter, who was suffering from a return of the nameless terrors, the shapeless fears, which Godwyn alone had been able to soothe. She pacified her by holding her closely in her arms, and singing the verses of some hymns to her in a low musical voice, whilst for the first time the mother stood fascinated, watching, no longer telling herself that she was unnecessarily alarmed, but wondering why *she* had never gained the girl's affection.

And Godwyn felt her heart yearn for the first time over the mother who had

really loved her child, in spite of her strange way of showing that love. She longed to think that the poor woman might be spared the shock which had come to blast the roof of self-righteousness from over her head, leaving her homeless and desolate.

From that time she began to sleep in Christine's room, and was so occupied with her that she had almost begun to forget her own minor troubles, when one morning, to her astonishment, Humphrey knocked at the door. She went to the door herself, with her finger on her lips.

"It is necessary for me to speak to you on a matter of some importance; I should not think of disturbing you otherwise. Is the illness so serious?" he said, endeavouring to assume as easily as possible his old indifferent manner.

“Well, you see you have creaky boots on, and any noise aggravates her disorder,” answered Godwyn, who was weary with a night vigil, as she prepared to follow him into an adjoining room.

He noticed that she lifted her eyelids as if the effort were too much for her, and explained a little awkwardly,

“I should not have come to you without grave reason. It is what people call an anxious hour. I suppose you know that they think the fire was the work of an incendiary, and that the fellow Carslake has been committed for trial?”

She gave him one quick inquiring glance to see if he could possibly be earnest.

“Never was graver in my life,” he

said, unconsciously answering the glance. "I assure you I would have given a good deal to prevent it, especially as the man was so courageous in aiding your escape; but the circumstantial evidence has proved too strong for the magistrates, and it is generally supposed that it was conscience which gifted the fellow with such superhuman energy. The mischief may have proved greater than he intended. But meanwhile an old fashioned great-coat resembling a cloak which he had in wear has been found near the burnt wing of the house, left by accident among the trees, and it seems that he was seen prowling about on the night of the fire. Faggots have been found, and matches."

"Does it strike no one that these things may have been put there purposely to point suspicion at Carslake?" said

Godwyn, repressing with difficulty a gesture of impatience.

"I fear not; he bore too bad a character."

"Not lately. He has been one of the most regular members of my class."

"That is neither here nor there. There was a scrimmage on one occasion in which somebody's game-keeper in a neighbouring parish got damaged; such things are not easily forgotten. There is the strongest feeling against him."

"I know poor Ned; he used to be accredited with the breaking of every fence, and the wiring of every hare that was robbed—sometimes, perhaps with reason, oftener not. But he has reformed since then."

"Give a dog a bad name," quoted Humphrey, incensed by her partisanship;

“at any rate he has been committed to prison without bail. Hayden’s evidence told dead against him. He admitted that he was the most insubordinate of the operatives—that he had been overheard to use threatening language, and that he had talked of organising a strike.”

“Oh indeed not lately. Mr. Hayden knows that Carslake is an altered man. If *he* were the principal accuser it seems to me to throw light on the case. I don’t trust Mr. Hayden,” rejoined Godwyn, with her tell-tale cheeks hanging out two red banners of indignation, and with voice swelling resentfully, and yet half in pain.

“Why don’t you trust him?”

“For reasons which I can’t explain.”

“Could you explain them to any one?”

“They don’t appear on the surface.”

“I am afraid that won’t help Carslake in a court of justice. Benevolent ladies are too ready to take these sort of men up, and encourage them in their aspirations bad as well as good.”

“Humphrey,” she said desperately, standing as if at bay, “how could I tell anyone that this man has thrown off the veil of an assumed character in his intercourse with me?—that he has spoken to me sometimes in wheedling flattery, and sometimes in rough, uncourteous tones, with an absolutely insulting air, and that he has proved himself to be arrogant and defiant? I have known that if Mr. Hayden were always to remain here he would be for ever a thorn in my flesh, but it would

be futile and hopeless for me to try to explain that he might wish to revenge himself through the helpless. Cannot *you* help poor Carslake?"

"Neither of us can help him," he answered, shaking his head, having decided, previously to the interview, that he must defend her against her own inexperience and the impulsive generosity of her girlish character. "I am afraid the evidence is too clear. The fellow is most likely a true promoter of the revolutionary spirit which has grown up lately amongst the hands."

"Then why did you come and tell me this?" she asked him almost sharply, knowing that Humphrey would be no longer likely to be influenced by her opinion, and seeing the hopelessness of rising to new heights of entreaty.

“Because I wanted to warn you against seeing the men just now. They are all, even the best of them, terribly excited. It will not be safe for you to face them or venture among them.”

She saw it would be useless to argue, but she made no promises, and could not help shedding tears when she heard how Carslake had been taken by surprise at the accusation. One of the servants described to her how, when he was committed for trial, there had been one or two convulsive twitches about the strong man's lips, and how then, with a ghastly stare, his muscles had relaxed and he had fallen back motionless. He could not have acted that faint, protested Godwyn more sorrowfully than before, when she heard how the work accomplished by her classes

seemed now to be futile, and how some of the other operatives lamented over the supposed injustice in a strain of wild, impotent rage and blasphemy.

One of her classes had already been delayed on account of the fire and Christine's illness, and now she thought it better to take Humphrey's advice and put off the meeting that was to have taken place on the following Sunday. It did not seem wise to venture amongst the men in their present humour. But the despair of Job's wife seemed to be on Carslake's mother. She repeated that she and her old man must have their bread, when her lad the only breadwinner in the family had been sent to jail. The policemen had been obliged to place their hands on her shoulders and push her with gentle force from

the prisoner. Then, immediately after the committal, she had taken to her bed, turning her face to the wall, and saying literally to her husband, "Let us curse and die!"

And when on the following Monday evening a messenger came with an urgent entreaty to Godwyn, the brave girl, disregarding all threatening of danger, ventured out to see the dying woman.

It was already dark when she reached the cottage, and not being immediately recognised, she was alarmed by the appearance of a few men clustered round the door, who growled inarticulate words with no benevolent meaning. She stumbled up the broken stairs by the fire-light, and found the usual cluster of matrons hanging about the room. But the snuffing out of this poor worn-

out old life was deemed a more serious occasion than usual, as she saw at once when she meet the awestruck look of one of the gossips.

The woman in the bed was past speaking: only her eyes seemed to belong to the living; the face was the face of a corpse. By the bedside knelt another old crone, with yellow face and skinny neck, who had a part of the dirty bedclothes crammed into her toothless mouth to keep down her sobs; and by the smouldering embers of the fire stood another and younger woman, leaning against the wall as if stupefied.

“Tell her,” said one of the neighbours, who seemed to be unusually agitated. “Yew know what she said to *us*—there’d be no dyin’ for sich as her till we had tauld the leddy all about it. Tell her,

Jenny. Baint ye ashamed to harry her by hauding yer tangle, and she a dyin' auld creetur? Make' a clane breast o' it, 'oman. Yew can do it better nor I can."

Godwyn sat down mechanically and looked at Mother Carslake. There could be no mistake. The imprint of death was too clearly set upon the wrinkled features. The dying woman made one or two attempts to speak, and was unable to articulate, but what struck Godwyn as so strange was the unusual look in her eyes, as if she were watching the other woman in a state of catalepsy, and perfectly conscious of what was going on around her. Once or twice the features became convulsed as if with painful feeling.

"Has she been long like this?" she asked one of the wondering neighbours.

“No,” they answered. “First the cries had been fearsome; you could heer ’em to the hend o’ the village; they greew worser and worser.”

And then it was that the sufferer explained to the awestruck listeners that she could not die, not till she had seen Miss Payton and made her confession.

“Spake for her, Jenny. Luk ’ow she is implorin of yer,” said the neighbour who had spoken at first, and who was more pitiful than the rest; and then Jenny, no longer able to help herself, told through her chattering teeth how on a certain night some years before, Mrs. Carslake, herself, and the other woman who was kneeling by the bedside, had agreed together to invoke the toad curse on Mr. Bardsley and all his belongings.

What was the toad curse? It had

to be explained that, after muttering incantations and stirring something in a pot over the fire, the three women, each with a toad procured for the purpose, had proceeded, at the hour of midnight, to a certain part of the country where three roads met, and then sticking pins up to the heads in the bodies of the writhing creatures they had buried each alive in a pot, not only muttering imprecations on Mr. Bardsley and his relations, but imploring Heaven to inflict on them to all eternity the same agonies as those endured by the toads. Godwyn began to feel rather weird and miserable as she listened to the story, especially when she heard that the superstitious old beldames had actually believed that the fire which had broken out in the wing of the house had re-

sulted in consequence of their curse.

Then for the first time Mrs. Carslake's conscience had been roused. For years past she had been accustomed to trade on the credulous fancies of her neighbours, many of whom still devoutly believed in wild legends respecting corpse candles and wandering ghosts. There was the dreary black pool far away on one of the cliffs still known as the "Witches' Pond," of which, as Godwyn had told Humphrey, it was said the sheep would not drink, neither would the birds fly over, and in which, had the old dame lived a century before, she would have had to undergo, most literally, the ordeal by water. The people around would not openly own that they thought Mother Carslake still careered through the air at midnight to hold horrible

orgies on the dark hill side, but they had come to her to tell their fortunes, and they had believed in her power as she believed in it herself.

And now that the poor old creature was stricken down speechless, it was difficult for Godwyn to explain to her the utter nonsense and wickedness of her pretended spells. The intended cruelty and the curses seemed to have rebounded on her own head, and few spectacles could have been more impressive to the gossiping women and sickly children who hung about the doors of the house and to the men who, with short pipes in their lips, lounged against the walls or collected in a group near the public-house, than that of Mother Carslake brought to repentance and trembling confession at last. The sound of Miss Pay-

ton's voice engaged in pleading prayer could be heard occasionally, like a "voice crying in the wilderness," through the murmuring of the wind and the moaning of the sea to those who listened intently from the street-door.

"She be a-goin' fast," muttered some of those who heard it. "It be ower late to be prayin' for her now."

"She be mortal bad," answered another, "but mebbe the A'mighty may tak' pity for sich prayin'."

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It was late when Godwyn, spent in body as well as mind, returned to the manor-house to encounter some reproaches for her unusual course of conduct.

There was a tragic unconventionality about the whole thing, and she knew

that she would be further blamed for her determination to see the poor fellow, whose state of mind had been so desperate since he was sent to goal. On this occasion she took one of the women from the village with her to give a message from the mother, which had been dictated before the old woman had lapsed into a state of speechlessness, but the message was received with unexpected indifference.

The prisoner would not at first speak to his former teacher who had made such an effort to visit him, and only answered his other friend in tones of fretfulness and contempt. He was full of gloomy revolt against fate, his strong hands clenched and his teeth set to stifle the sharpness of his pain.

The task was beyond Godwyn's strength. He seemed to wake up for a

moment at the sight of her in fierce indignation, his dark features working. How could they think he would hurt a hair of her head? Her tongue felt parched, and her lips dry with all she had gone through that evening, as she pleaded,

“Speak to me, poor Carslake. I *know* you did not do it. Don’t look like that. I know nothing of what has happened. I do not wish to know; but I am certain you never set fire to the house, and that you did not wish any of us to be burnt to death.”

“Miss,” he answered at last a little gruffly, “if it be all true that yew ha told us—if there be a God—why don’t he prevent it?”

Her fervent zeal for these wretched

ones and her tender love towards the whole human brotherhood seemed to be thwarted for a time, and she reproached herself for uttering truisms as she answered.

“He *will* prevent it. Don’t think about it, Ned, if you can’t understand. Pray to Him and He will help you. It may seem dark to you just now, but soon it will be light.”

“Mebbe He ha forgotten,” said the poor fellow grimly. “Anyhow, there were Mr. Hayden as swore that he clapped eyes on me, ’is own self, as I were wanderin’ about the place. That’s for sartin, and the lees are believed. Couldn’t he ha lighted on some other poore miserable devil?”

“No, God doesn’t forget you. I wish I could clear it up for you, but it *will* be cleared up,” was all Godwyn

could murmur, and she had to give up the task of convincing him as perfectly ineffectual.

CHAPTER VII.

GODWYN was not surprised when she heard that the Neales talked of leaving for the Continent and wintering at Monaco. There was no longer anything to attract pleasure-seekers at Dornton manor-house; the change which had come over the scene being almost as great as that described by Thomson in his "Castle of Indolence."

Olive was no better, and the doctors now spoke rather more seriously of the shock which her nervous system had received on the night of the fire. In-

stead of being clever, amusing, and affluent in attractions as before, she had now become listless and petulant. Her peach cheek had lost its colour; her large eyes looked sunken and restless; and the brow which had been so smooth and open was now often contracted as if with pain.

“She is very weak from the shock,” explained kindly Mrs. Neale, whose own face, so full usually of bright goodwill, now bore the traces of suffering and unnatural anxiety; “but I do not think you can blame the fire for it all. There are other symptoms,” she added, lowering her voice and taking Godwyn into her confidence, “symptoms, sadly significant, of which I should not think of speaking to the medical men, but which a mother cannot but read aright.”

Mrs. Neale hesitated after these words,

struggling between her reluctance to inflict a wound upon Godwyn and her determination that justice should be done to her daughter.

"I wonder if she could tell me anything," she thought, as Godwyn's eyes sank towards the ground, for she had ceased to think that Mr. Hayden was Godwyn's only admirer.

"Symptoms," answered Godwyn, trying to escape scrutiny, "which the amusements at Monaco and the pretty dresses which are being packed into so many cubic feet of trunks will very quickly cure, I hope."

"God grant it may be so!" answered the mother with a heavy sigh. "She has always been so bright. My dear, I do not like to complain to *you* of—well, of—Mr. Humphrey Bardsley. If I did not think I could trust you I should

not let these words pass my lips, but I may tell you in confidence that Mr. Humphrey won her affections by attentions which he was bound not to show to her if he did not mean to ask her to be his wife. He behaved to her like a lover," she added, sinking her voice.

Her hearer had so steeled herself to hear the news that she did not even change colour, and when Mrs. Neale, whose keen curiosity was still struggling with her dread of appearing intrusive, added falteringly, "You are so superior to these things, you must not look down on my poor Olive," Godwyn was ready for the emergency, and answered with the smile of a young Spartan,

"Am I supposed to look down upon marriage? Oh, I don't look

down upon it. Who said so? I consider it a very good provision for old age."

"Your love is not of this world, my dear. You are wedded to your good works and your music. Ah! my dear, I know it. Your heart is not unoccupied enough to be capable of any strong passion."

"Have you done asking me questions?" asked Godwyn, with an irony which she could not help. "There are wives and mothers very happy, no doubt, though they *may* give up all that enchants and fills my life."

She spoke in a tone of sharp incisiveness unusual to her—*anything* to be freed from the torrent of further catechism.

Anything! Even the ordeal of being

sent for to see Olive the very next morning, and of finding the girl with the colour returning to her cheeks and the brightness to her eyes, full of the news that Humphrey Bardsley had determined to follow herself and her mother to Monaco.

“He has been, just as I have been, bored to death, and it will amuse him so much,” she chattered with returning vivacity. “It is so dull here during an English winter, but I shall be able to open fresh horizons to him,” with a quick action of her hand describing a great orb in space, to indicate the immensity of the horizons which she would open to him.

“Indeed !” answered Godwyn, with a forced smile and a pang at her heart. “I am doubtful about your opening fresh ‘horizons,’ as you call them, to any one,

but I should like to see you do everything in your power to widen your future husband's, or any one else's, sphere of vision. You are sometimes witty, and you are always nice to look at, but you don't try very much to increase your knowledge. You make a joke about your ignorance out of bravado."

"Silence, you little lecturer!" cried Olive, interrupting her and presenting her pretty face to be kissed, though she felt that there was a bitterness quite unusual in her stronger-minded friend's advice. "You never used to preach, but I suppose you think you are privileged to say anything *now*. You dear creature, how you helped me that awful night! There was something quite dramatic about it," she added with a shudder.

"Excuse me, there was *nothing* dra-

matic about it," answered Godwyn, coldly conscious of the fact that there should be room between them only for the most simple and ordinary sentiments.

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"Why are you so anxious to leave us, and at a time like this, when you may be really wanted?" asked Mr. Bardsley, when his nephew came to announce to him his intention of quitting home for a little time that night. "I don't see why you should hurry away with so abrupt a leave-taking unless there is something unusual in the case."

"Perhaps there *is* something unusual."

"A woman, then?"

"Yes," Humphrey answered drily.

"When are you off?"

“To-morrow week.”

“How long do you stay?”

“That depends. It must depend on *you*. I don't know how long you may be able to spare me.”

“Humphrey, it reminds me,” said the old man, after a pause, never doubting that Godwyn was the woman in question, “I have permitted Godwyn to take a couple of acres off the land and to let it out in plots to the workpeople; there are plenty of children, and they may want to grow potatoes. I should have thought of these things before.”

“It would have made no difference.”

“What a pity you are so bitter!”

“The people here are a roughish lot; I am dead sick of it. I have tried to argue with the wildest of them once or twice since that affair of Carslake's, but

it was of no use; I am as hoarse as a raven with shouting to them."

It was a strange conversation which gave the elder man a feeling of astonished inquietude. Keener than Mrs. Neale, he thought to himself,

"There is a hitch between him and Godwyn. He has spoken, and she won't have him after all my hopefulness."

Tears came into the aged eyes, and the young man was troubled.

"I have wounded you, and I owe everything to you," he said, holding the trembling hand a little longer than usual in parting.

"Yes. I don't wish to fathom your secrets, but I confess I don't understand the tone of constraint which you have lately adopted to me. For some time you have been strange, and it

seems as if I annoy you whenever I attempt to advise. If you wish to put an end to the paternal feeling which I have always had for you, well——”

“It is *not* well,” said Humphrey, interrupting him hotly. “You must trust me if I am compelled to go for a time, and I will return at the shortest notice. But do not misinterpret my motives.”

Even now he meant to remain at the slightest sign from Godwyn, and that evening he took courage again to follow her as she slipped out of the room (when dinner was over) into her favourite part of the garden, with the stars overhead multiplying their shafts of light, and the twilight having waned, so that he could but dimly see her large grave eyes and the outline of the soft silk of her hair.

"You have been shut up in a sick room all the morning, you will be fagging yourself again to-night. The air is necessary for you. Do not let me frighten you away," he said, as he caught her in the act of trying to make a desperate rush to avoid encountering him. "I only ask you to give me a beggarly five minutes."

"Some people can say a good deal in five minutes," she answered, trying to laugh, yet knowing, as her heart sank, that the hottest of the fight with what she called her own selfishness was yet to come, and that buckler and sword could not be laid by.

"Ah! you can laugh," he said reproachfully. "Well, I suppose I have laid myself open to chaff by the absurd way in which I have been going on lately. Godwyn, you won't be

troubled with me any longer. I am going away."

"Are you?" she said calmly.

He was quite out of patience with her. It was not as if he stood low in the matrimonial market. A score of girls would marry him for the asking. And *this one*—in whom he now began to know he had not merely lost the object of a few months' passion, but who was bound up with the purest memories of his boyhood, and who had become as necessary to his existence as the air and the light—was she, after all, less in some respects than other ordinary girls? Was she really a loving, self-denying woman, or a cold-blooded anomaly, whose heart was merged in the intellect?

"*Are you?*" he repeated, mimicking her tone. "Have you no heartier word

of parting for me than that? Is auld lang syne so little to you? Then I *will* go," he added almost sharply, more vexed than pleased when, being so adjured, she took his hand in a friendly way, as if in readiness for the parting.

"I want to whisper something," she said. "Stoop down. They tell me that I am tall, but you are taller still, and let me say it—there, that will do—Humphrey, I hope from my heart that you will be happy. God bless you, my old playmate, many, *many* blessings, and if you are going to marry Olive, I hope—I *do* hope that you will be happy!"

And then she fled away in the growing darkness, trying not to show a single symptom of what was going on in her mind. And yet it was hard

not to feel during the next few days as if so much treasure had been filched away from her. There were ideals in her heart the existence of which no one suspected. She had never whispered a word about them to any one, and when in discontented moods they had tried to obtrude themselves into her notice she had often tried ruthlessly to dash them down. And what, she asked herself, had she to do with them *now*? They belonged to the bygone world of her childhood when her loving heart had been filled with a whole world of ideal people.

One night soon after the Neales left Dornton, Christine was more feverish than usual. In her state of delirium she had turned shrieking from her mother, and only Godwyn had been able to soothe her. The moanings of

the poor invalid during the troubled sleep which followed haunted Godwyn's memory on the following day, and filled her with undefined anxiety. She escaped in the morning to wander on the cliffs. There had been heavy rain during the night, and many glittering rivulets were adding their basins of water to the sea. The sun was shining after the rain, and though she missed the lark's note mounting higher and higher to the sky, the rich tints of the fern and heather, and the splendour of the changing leaves, were a compensation for the departed glories of the summer.

The walk would have been a refreshing one, had it not been for the unexpected disaster of suddenly encountering Mr. Hayden, who had in reality been haunting this part

of the cliff for days, and who now advanced to meet her with a look on his face which seemed to say he was glad that chance had given him this opportunity, though it was not of his own seeking. She pretended not to see his outstretched hand, and yet was not able to prevent it when he grasped hers, pressing it tightly before she could quickly withdraw it.

“Have you heard that old Mother Carslake is dead?” he asked, marvelling at her pride and complete composure.

“Yes,” she answered wearily, “the clergyman was with her. I heard about it last night, but I do not wish to talk about it just now. I am tired, and must ask you to leave me to my own thoughts.”

“There are times when one’s own thoughts are a curse,” he said passionately. “Look here! I am sorry for those Carslakes. The son is a *protégé* of yours. I have it in my power to get him off, and I wish to do so yet, if—if you will permit me?”

“So you admit that you have means of clearing the poor fellow, and you refuse to perform an act of the barest justice unless you can extract a promise from *me*?” she said slowly in her fearless honesty, with hot cheeks and kindling eyes. “Mr. Hayden, I despise falseness of every kind, and will not tolerate or connive at it,” she continued with the indignation which was shown so visibly in her face, and yet speaking in a voice of ice.

He had forgotten that she had a

nature which recoiled from duplicity, and was greatly irritated by her answer, and by the coldness of her voice.

He would have liked to have been able to answer, "I am aware that an impunity in insult has been reckoned for ages amidst the privileges of women," but he could not get out the words. He began to wonder if this stern moralist would expose him. He had meant to tell her that if she would promise to be his wife he could bring forward evidence which would clear the prisoner in whom she was interested, but his power of speech seemed to have deserted him.

He was secretly writhing in an agony of wounded pride, and the beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, as she drew her garments round her with

a gesture which to his excited fancy seemed like determining to avoid contamination, and tried to trip past him on her homeward way.

“Ah! you may look at me as if I were some crawling, unclean thing, and you so far above me in your white purity! Somebody has been polluting your ears with vile slanders about me,” he exclaimed.

She stared at him in dull wonder.

“You are mistaken. Nobody has said a word about you,” she answered, still trying to pass.

“Will you listen to me?” he implored. “It is your fault if I have done anything bad. *You* have driven me to desperation. But I will set everything right and explain everything if you will listen to me and be my wife.”

“No, I will not listen to you. The

whole thing is shameful and odious," she said, stopping suddenly, with nostrils dilated and clenched hands, and speaking as if she were half suffocated. "How *dare* you speak to me about being your wife! If you do not tell the truth, I shall be forced to tell it. From the first I distrusted you, and *you know it.*"

"I have had so much to bear already that this put into the scale only adds a feather's weight, and yet I feel as if he had humiliated me," she thought as he fell back from her, alarmed at her almost abhorrent gesture, and left her unmolested to continue her way.

"I believe she hates the ground I tread on," he groaned to himself as he sought his home, where the new thoughts, which kept up a sort

of unintermittent stinging, would not permit him to rest.

So strange a thing was the awakening of conscience to him, that he felt as if he were treated as criminals were in the Dark Ages, when they had to be forced by torture to the confession of their misdemeanours, pricked with needles, wrapped in hair suits, or rolled over on the other side when sleep began to overtake them.

He resented the persecution of this newly-aroused power, and raved against the infliction with a new sympathy for Caliban, who reviled Prospero for the nips and twitchings which never improved his moral condition.

CHAPTER VIII.

GODWYN had no time to sit moping like other disappointed heroines in novels, watching the autumn and winter days trailing their slow length away. Her limits of action, and even of thought, seemed to be accurately defined for the present. Her life was before her with plenty to do, and with no time to weep over sentimental regrets. On the nights when she was ordered to take some rest and not to fatigue herself in Christine's room, she often woke startled and confused, for vague fears

haunted her that the end was nearer than the other watchers thought to be possible. One night, when the doctor had to be sent for because the poor little sufferer had an attack of pain more terrible than usual, she knew that he could only come to pronounce the death warrant.

And when her suspicions were confirmed and the doctor gave no hope, though there was a nameless chill at her own heart, it was she who had to soothe the half-crushed mother, who was utterly unnerved and helpless in the presence of death.

“Oh, aunt, how I wronged you!” she said, throwing her arms round the broken-down woman, no longer self-willed or strong minded. “If you misjudged me, I also misjudged

you, but let us forgive and comfort each other ! Indeed, indeed it is better so. Think how terrible this last month has been for us both. And now there will be no more wild wrestlings, no more sick complaints or nervous fancies. This world could never be a happy resting-place for poor Christine !”

Mrs. Melksham felt like a vanquished woman in the presence of the king of terrors. But her swollen eyes and haggard looks told volumes of that hidden affection for the daughter, whom Godwyn had once thought she slighted and despised, which might otherwise never have been revealed. Her pride and antagonism had been swept away, and for the first time she understood Godwyn thoroughly, and sat listen-

ing with white face and shaking hands to the soft clear voice, which had so often been galling and hurtful to her before, singing the lines which the sick girl would ask for again and again—

“If I still hold closely to Him,

What hath He at last ?

Sorrow vanquished, labour ended,

Jordan passed.”

All was over at last, and Christine sank like a little child quietly to sleep, her hand locked in her mother's hand, but her head pillowed on Godwyn's bosom.

“She is awake now, seeing the King in His beauty, and she will never suffer more,” whispered the girl, as a cry of desolation arose in the room from the mother, whose loss had left her nervous, and who would

never have the same self-control again.

"Aunt Laura must stay here for the present, and *I* must take care of her," Godwyn said pleadingly to her uncle after the funeral. "She has become very dear to me, and I feel as if I ought to make amends to her because I once had a little bitterness of feeling towards her. I used to think she was ashamed of poor Christine, but all that hardness was on the surface."

"You are forgiving to everyone," he said in reply. And then for the first time it struck her that her uncle's face looked strained with anxiety, and she had to be informed of what had taken place in the outer world during the gloomy weather whilst Mr. Bardsley had steadily refused to allow

her to continue her classes, and she had been shut up in the privacy of the sick room. Not only had there been a low ferment of discontent among the operatives, but some of them had read the newspapers, and were much impressed by the speeches of delegates, who, with plenty of London confidence, had been sent to towns in the North to organise strikes. The principle of combination, strong for evil as well as for good, and putting a decided power into the hands of the workmen, had already turned the heads of some of the paper-workers at Dornton.

“A fair day's wage for a fair day's work! Men, have you got that? You must get it by combination. You must join the Union,” the delegates were reported to have said amid stentorian plaudits. “There's plenty of meat and drink

to be had, but the masters keep it all to themselves." But somehow it was the urgent need for "meat and drink" which threatened to make any idea of a strike at Dornton a failure.

Education was still at such a low ebb in the place that they scarcely knew whether to call it a "strike" or not, but it seemed to be plain that the men could clamour for an increase of wages, and refuse to work till it was given to them.

The mills were already standing still, and the ringleaders prided themselves on the probability of their winning a decisive victory—too decisive, in that the master might be ruined by the importation of Belgian paper, and might soon have no more work to give them. Most of the poorer operatives at Dornton lived so entirely from hand to mouth that already grim want was making its appearance

in the homes of those who would fain win bread for their little ones, but who dared not offer themselves for work for fear of the mates who threatened to take vengeance on them—homes over which the consequences of the refusal to labour, threw a deep and terrible gloom, with leisure a curse, and with children wailing for bread. There were some of the men who tried to lounge about sternly, with folded hands, and with the inevitable pipe to deaden their feelings and help them to imitate the Spartan endurance of workers at other trades, who had refused to toil for the low wages which had been paid to the paper-makers at Dornton. These more heroic spirits had tried to form themselves into a committee, but had not the necessary energy to help them to outwit the bitter-tongued

mothers who were fain to purchase cordials instead of bread to still the torments of their infants, the reckless youngsters who were fighting and quarrelling instead of being employed, or the sulky comrades who kept off all thoughts about the future by boozing at the public-house with the few pennies which were left to them.

As to old Mr. Bardsley, it was as if his world began to sway upon its axis. Somebody had suggested to him that it might be as well to send for a few policemen from Knaresbury, but he had taken no notice of the suggestion. At times he would seem to be too apathetic to take in the real meaning of what was passing around him. He would ask fretfully what was the matter, and then, without waiting for an answer, return to his books. At other times,

with his old tendency to shift the burden on other shoulders, he would ask irritably for Hayden, and demand to know what he was thinking of in losing time when he ought to quell these resistant spirits, but when Hayden appeared before him, sometimes stuttering and a little confused, but more generally wearing the air of injured innocence, which, if counterfeit, was well assumed, he was easily mollified by his excuses.

“Hayden tells me that that wretched Carslake was plotter-in-chief,” he remarked when he met Godwyn at lunch-time after one of these interviews. “It is easy now to understand the fellow’s intention in setting fire to the room in which the account books were kept, and so much valuable property belonging to the business. These things were destroyed with a motive, and the

punishment should be penal servitude."

"There is other valuable property entrusted to Mr. Hayden. Are you wise to trust him so thoroughly?" asked Godwyn in a tremulous voice, looking down at her plate. She did not believe the story about Carslake, and wondered how her uncle could have failed to notice the moral shuffling in the manager's character which was so disagreeable to her, but to her astonishment no notice was taken of her speech. In his secret soul Mr. Bardsley thought it absurd for a woman to meddle with such questions.

The shock of recent events had not yet crushed her—it seemed only to have startled her into keener energy; but what could a woman do? More than once she had risked being misunderstood by asking her uncle to

telegraph for Humphrey, but when he had answered with his accustomed apathy, no longer seeming to trouble himself about his projects for their future, that things would be settled in one way or another before Humphrey could arrive from Monaco, and he did not see that his nephew could do anything to better them, she had to be content with the answer. The strike had several aspects rendering it unpleasant and dangerous to the prospects of the Bardsleys for the future, but if the old man resolutely shut his eyes to these things, what could a girl do?

One morning, when she was busied with household affairs, a letter was brought to her by a deaf and dumb boy, who was often employed as a messenger in the village, and who never could give information concerning the people who sent

him on their errands. She took it from the child and saw that it was written on a dirty bit of paper, and addressed in scrawling handwriting to herself. Opening it, she had some trouble to decipher the words:—

“ ’Onard Mees,

“ There be they as is on th’ quiet as ’ll bide still no langer—i naam no naames but wudn’t anser as bluud on’t be shede afore night and lifes in danger. Its cam’ owt as it were Hayden hisself as set fire to the ’ouse. A chap saw he do it, and ’e ought to insure his life now nocks is plenty. They’ve draw’d a coffing and sent it to ’im. They’ve brake out agen him and taken law in their own han’s.

“ I am Respekfully,

“ A MAN AS FEARS BLUID-SHED.”

Her heart beat fast as she read the letter and understood the baleful significance of the menacing message. Things were then past her control, and could be remedied now by no jugglery of events. Hayden was suddenly revealed in his true colours. She had always believed him to be a noxious, contemptible slave-driver, grinding down the poor for his selfish purposes, but she had never thought so badly of him as this. He had played the scoundrel probably to shield himself from some consequences which might ensue on the examination of the papers, and she believed he might have been capable of appropriating the money supposed to be burnt in the building.

He had endeavoured to shift his guilt on an innocent man, though the public

feeling had been so strongly in favour of Ned Carslake that he was not to take his trial till the Spring Assizes, to allow more time for the collecting and investigation of the evidence, which had proved conflicting. The workmen, who were already incensed against the manager—how often had Godwyn heard them muttering curses under their breath!—would probably attack him without any twinges of conscience, and have recourse to some act of Lynch law which the quarter sessions would be powerless to undo. Her principal hope was in the absence of any fixed plans and the indecision which might be expected on the part of a particularly stupid, uneducated mob from the want of any recognised leader.

Some of the Dornton men were still red-hot from the flaring speeches which

they had read in the newspapers, and the resistance which had been stirred up in them by leaders in rebellion, and their present state of suffering had enhanced their anger and made them ready for any act of savagery. For a long time Godwyn had had good reason to fear that the smouldering fire might end in some sudden deed of violence.

With a horrible recollection of fists that buffet and iron heels that bruise, she ran with the letter to her uncle, but received no help from him. He first looked scornfully at the anonymous composition, and then threw it into the fire.

“It’s all a hoax,” he said languidly. “They may make up these stories about Hayden, who has tried to keep them in order, to deceive *you*, but they will never

venture to defy him openly, though they may frighten a woman."

She did not answer him, but, hoping yet to interpose between the rioters and their victim, she sent a servant on horseback with a message to Mr. Hayden's house warning him yet to escape from the threatened retaliation. The messenger never reached it, for he came in contact with a crowd of men, women, and children, convulsed by a common passion and roused by a common grievance, who, with the heavy thud of determined numbers, were already making desolate chaos of the manager's pretty garden, and trampling down the shrubs as they stormed their way to the attack.

Foremost in the ranks marched one of Carslake's brothers, dragging with him the boy who had lain concealed

amongst the trees, and who said he had watched the manager apply a lighted torch to the woodwork on the night of the fire, and had only kept silent through intimidation until now. After the boy, whose face was white with terror, marched the members of the so-called committee, who had investigated the story so far as to prove that Ned Carslake's cloak had certainly been stolen from him on the same terrible night—an assertion which had not been credited before—and who said that they were going to make Hayden give up the proof of his guilt. At their heels followed a wild and ragged regiment of men who were already battling with want as the consequences of the strike, and who had been looking out for days past for some means of revenge—some opportunity of being brought face to face

with the manager; and viragos who did not know much about the facts of the case, but whose watchword was, "We wants proper beddin', warm clothin', and vittals for the childer."

The crowd, forming itself into a compact mass, so as to bar the doorway of the house, called with significant growls for "owd Hayden" to come down. No one came to answer the knocks and calls, and already, with muttered exclamations of rage and discontent—the leaven of passion and grief having gathered inert particles, and swollen as it proceeded—the women, who were foremost in vociferations of execration, began to urge the men to break in the door.

In this emergency the members of the committee, not one of whom, as might have been expected, had conceived

a prompt and efficient plan to be carried out without faltering, began to remonstrate. Some whisperings of the police who might be expected to arrive from Knaresbury, in consequence of a message from Godwyn, had yet power to control them, frantic though they were in their state of savage irritability, showing fight, and looking out for an exciting scrimmage. The men looked around them with stealthy glances, a little frightened at the frantic gesticulations of the women.

“Boys!” shouted one virago, “break open the door and get your wages! Is it law that ye are to have no money to buy food?”

“Men!” cried another, “we won’t be put upon or have our childer put upon! If we’re poor we’re strong!”

“Batter the door!” shouted many

voices. "Make him come out!" "Break in the shutters!" "Duck him in the pond!"

But at that instant a pale face showed at one of the windows. It was one of the hated manager's servants, with the scared face of her fellow-servant peeping in comparative safety behind her, so terrified as to have almost lost the power of speech.

At the sound of the clasp of the iron heels and the execrations of the mob the girl raised her hands appealingly to heaven, and at the cry of "Where is he?" she could at first only shake her head. But when at last she gained sufficient courage to explain in a hoarse voice, sinking in a way that threatened tears, that her master had abandoned them to their fate, leaving the house a couple of days ago,

and she believed, from a letter he had left behind him, that he had gone to "Americay," the explanation was received by faces distorted with passion and with yells of disappointment.

"Open the door!" was the cry as before; and at last, when the couple of girls, who were as frightened as timid hares—one of them weeping scalding tears for the master who had proved to be one of the sorriest scoundrels on the face of the earth, and both of them with a nervousness which had such multiplying powers that the crowd before them seemed to number thousands instead of hundreds—were compelled to undo the bolts with shaking fingers, they met with no worse personal treatment than that of finding themselves roughly jostled. They were a little pulled about, now this

way, now that, as if through the mazes of catch-me-that-catch-can, as the intruders rushed up the stairs and scrambled for the pretty drawing-room ornaments and articles of furniture to which they thought themselves entitled as payment for their bread.

Hayden had left nothing valuable in his sudden flight. In the letters which he had left behind him—one addressed to Mr. Bardsley—he had scarcely attempted to account for his sudden disappearance. That *he* had been the incendiary, and that he had fled the country after having robbed his employer to a terrible extent and destroyed all the books and papers which would have proved his guilt, was soon established beyond a doubt. One of the maids was even ready to admit that her master had taken the precaution of leaving Dornton

disguise, and that he was in a state of exhaustion and strained anxiety pitiful to witness. So much was certain, and perhaps his best safeguard was in attempting no defence. For though Mr. Bardsley had already bitter proof of the unscrupulousness of the man whom he had trusted, he was willing to take a share of the blame on himself for his lavish expenditure and over-large profits.

The confidence which he had placed in Hayden had at first been well merited, but had proved in the course of years to be but a weak break-water to the master passion of avarice. The fellow had fled away rich, to commence life again probably in one of the colonies, and possibly under an assumed name, the little story about America proving to be a fiction with which he staved off the disagreeable idea of men-

tioning his whereabouts, but certain it was that before his flight a punishment greater than any which Mr. Bardsley could have inflicted, if he had attempted to pursue him, had commenced already. Undying conscience had its fangs in him; all his animation and pugnacious vigour had left him. Those who had seen him last on horseback were able to describe how the figure was prematurely bowed which before was strong and vigorous. He had fled from the public execrations, but he could not escape the personal shame.

“Weak as a reed, and yet it was *I* who put temptation into his way. What could I do? I loathed the whole thing myself, and could not shift such a burden on the shoulders of a mere schoolboy. I wanted Humphrey to be free and happy, at least in the days of his youth,” said the old man to his sister,

stifling the inward groan of self-reproach.

Aunt Laura, rendered partially callous by her greater sorrow, muttered something incoherent about pride and ill-fortune, and her belief that Humphrey would have proved but a laggard scholar where any real work was to be accomplished, whilst Rachel, who had been sent for to act as another Job's comforter in the dark days which had set in for her brother at Dornton, uttered what sounded like a woman's apology for the ill-doer, virtually beyond the pale of apology—she having always had a lurking fancy for Hayden.

“If he had not been exposed to such fierce temptations—life is so much harder to men than to women—and if Godwyn had only been a little kinder to him, perhaps he might not have behaved so cruelly and ungratefully.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE trouble visible in her guardian's face, as the state of his affairs was revealed to him by degrees, was almost more than Godwyn could bear. With men, who have strong feelings habitually under control, and who are generally intrepid and calm, such trouble is painful to witness.

With the workpeople striking for higher wages, and Mr. Bardsley himself reduced to comparative poverty, what prospect, as he sometimes asked, could there be for the future? He had tele-

graphed to Humphrey to recall him, but there were times when it was difficult for him to forgive himself for having brought up the young man with such "great expectations" and yet in such unnecessary indolence. He had been proud of the handsome idle young fellow who rode so fearlessly and shot so well, but now he was sorry for the boy who had never felt the need of work, or expressed a wish with which it had been necessary for his uncle to interfere.

Then there were his sisters partially dependent upon him, and the girl whom he had adopted, without making any provision for her, to whom it became more and more necessary that he should speak plainly and tell her her true position.

It was characteristic of Godwyn that

little suspecting how a part of the old man's trouble referred to herself, she should be bestirring herself actively, and even risking personal insult, to do what she could with the people.

From cottage to cottage she had toiled during the days which intervened between Hayden's flight and Humphrey's expected arrival, entreating the men to have patience, and assuring them that when the young master arrived all would be well.

Many of the women had opened their doors eagerly to her, entreating her to use her influence with their husbands, and gladly accepting the food which she brought for the children.

Godwyn had even walked to the neighbouring town and sold the little articles of jewellery which came to her from her mother, or which had been given to her

through her guardian's lavish generosity, to purchase bread in this interval. Even her watch had disappeared, but of this she said nothing, only remarking, when Mr. Bardsley sent for her,

"I think they will soon see their mistake. They are beginning to see it already. The excitement among the workmen will soon die out. It was all owing to Mr. Hayden's real or supposed injustice."

Mr. Bardsley shook his head. What could a mere girl know of a case like this? "I should like them to think more about their duties, and less about their rights," he said. But ignoring the shake, she continued earnestly,

"I think I have made most of the members of the so-called committee see that the consequences may be disastrous to themselves."

“Humph!” he answered. “The right of the men to combine must be admitted, however strongly we may disapprove of it. But the stump orators who have done so much mischief in other branches of trade have not come here, and if a strike cannot be properly conducted under the control of trades-unionism it can be only like a guerilla war, and not the discipline of an army.”

He was quoting from a letter just received from his nephew, which had astonished him by its insight into the circumstances; but he was too much out of heart to explain that his wisdom came second-hand from Humphrey.

“Yes, dear,” she said sagely, “I am sure that is true; but Mr. Hayden was a little hard, and—and—I suppose they think they have a right to demand some concessions from you.”

Then for the first time he said he must wait till Humphrey returned.

She hailed it as a good omen that he should begin to depend upon Humphrey, whom he had hitherto been inclined to ignore in all matters of business. Altogether he found the task of talking to her of his comparative poverty much easier than he had expected.

She treated it as if it were a matter of so little consequence that although he said to her, "Ah, dear! you do not know what ruin means," he began to feel a little relieved, as if he had overestimated the consequences of his own fatal folly, and need not suffer so acutely from the sharp tooth of his remorse.

"My poor sister," he lamented, "is quite crushed. She will never hold her head up again. I don't know how to pre-

pare her. She is not so strong as she used to be, and now in her recent mourning, too, the surprise may hurt her."

"I think you exaggerate things a little," answered Godwyn, stroking his hand in her comforting way. "Aunt Rachel has plenty of strong good sense. *She* will not fret about trifles; and as to Aunt Laura, she is not dependent on you, she has her own private property, and her two children at school; the very greatness of her recent trouble will be sure to swamp all minor ones."

He was a good deal relieved. Godwyn's calm, cool way of taking things was often a surprise to him, and it would have been well had he had no more agitating news to break to her.

"It is hard you should have new

troubles of your own, poor child," he began nervously. "*My* troubles have been bad enough for you to bear, but I—I—perhaps have been to blame for being a coward and keeping back other—more trying news from you."

He hesitated and stammered.

"I—I should have told you long ago ——"

And she, seeing that something dreadful was coming, only wished that it might come quickly and be over. Her heart was preparing itself for a crisis, but scarcely for the intelligence that came upon her. The memories of her childhood were very dim and indistinct—how her mother had died in India, and how her father had been separated from her in some not very glorious but mysterious fashion, leaving her no heritage but that of sorrow, and no home

save that which her so-called uncle, Mr. Bardsley in Devonshire, might be able to offer her.

She had now to learn that Mr. Bardsley was no relation to her at all—that there was no tie of any kind between herself and Humphrey. She had always cherished sentimental fancies about her soldier-father, who was in such a deplorable fashion compelled to live far away from her. He was, as she knew from experience, not given to writing letters, but she had made excuses for his unwillingness to correspond with the daughter who was sent to England when she had been such a baby-faced creature.

Possibly he thought of her as a baby-faced creature still, and could hardly be expected to waste parental affection and sheets of paper and envelopes on a

motherless child of a sex which he did not understand. So had she reasoned with herself, wishing to revere the sanctity of fatherhood, she who had known so little of a mother !

But when her father's story was briefly and gently told—Mr. Bardsley, sifting the facts clear from superstitious hearsay, and dwelling as lightly as possible on the dismal reality that Godwyn had been sent to him penniless, abandoned to his care by the captain who had been airily trenching on his capital for years before the misfortune overtook him which deprived him of his pension—the suddenness of the information overcame her. “The affair was known in many circles of society,” he explained, “and for that reason, as I had no right to change your name, I sent you to Heidelberg for your edu-

cation, and—you must have noticed it—I have kept you away from London.” Then the first time she realised her true position, and the bewilderment of her cruel and unexpected misfortune caused a sensation of physical faintness. The benevolent face of her kindly guardian became blurred with indistinguishable features, and the room swam before her as if it had been a ship at sea.

“He was, so it was reported, an attempted murderer, only by accident he did not die in a felon’s cell. He—*my father!*” she thought to herself, with sounds like the booming of advancing waves in her ears. Then the great circles of sound were widening and dying away, and she—new to such sensations—felt as if her brain swam and swung with torturing questions.

“ I should have been taught that I was not like other children, but that I was *branded*, branded !” was her first morbid idea, and her next, “ Did Olive know about this ? It was kind of her, after all, not to taunt me with it.”

For memory suddenly brought back words which she had overheard, but which had been an enigma to her. Aunt Rachel had once stopped Olive Neale in what had seemed like a meaningless allusion, saying, “ Don’t you know that your chattering may do no end of mischief ?”

How kind Aunt Rachel had been to her, and how kind others had been from the time of her intrusion into a house to which she had never belonged ! Remembering with what respect and tenderness she had always been treated in the presence of strangers, it seemed as

if she must have dreamt, and Mr. Bardsley was not telling her this terrible story. Then she was roused to the consciousness that he was sitting opposite to her, looking at her anxiously, and that it was necessary for his sake that she should not seem to be too much affected by what he had told her.

Her face, which had been ashy pale, changed as he watched her to the red tint of a sunset sky. Never had he before seen her in such scarlet discomfiture.

“Uncle,” she began, her voice giving a half-articulate sound, and then sinking into anguished silence, for suddenly she remembered that he was no longer her uncle. It seemed to her as if she had lost nearly all the good things on earth at a clean sweep.

“Uncle,” she essayed again, forcing

herself to make an effort, "you have not told me all. You have heard—from my father."

She could not have explained any more than he could how she had arrived at such a quick prevision of the truth. For certain it was that he *had* been withholding a letter.

"Are you strong enough to hear it, or shall I keep it back from you? Still, perhaps it will be better," he said, undecided, as he generally was in trouble, and fumbling for it in his pocket.

"No, give it to me directly," she implored, holding out her hand.

"Poor fellow! God help him!" he muttered, as her tears dropped over the letter.

"I must go to him at once. He will die without me. I—I ought to have known all this before. I could never

have been cheerful as I have been all these years if I could have guessed that things had been with him like this," she sobbed in her changed mood, repentant already for having blamed the man who was more sinned against than sinning, and who was—if he had forgotten her during the greater part of her life—still her father.

"I would go with you directly if I could leave this place," he faltered, unwilling to spare her, and yet approving her resolution.

"I could not stay here when once I knew about it; it would be undutiful and cruel."

"Very well, but if misery comes to you, poor child, don't blame *me*," he answered, surprised at the marked determination in her voice, and then rather nervously he added, "Will you not wait

till Humphrey returns? It strikes me that Humphrey may have a good deal to say about this. You may have heard that I made a will long ago leaving everything to him; I may not have much to leave now, and I should not think it right to alter my will, but I have good reasons for thinking that Humphrey may prefer to share the miserable remnant of my property with *you*."

"That would be impossible," she said, pressing her hands upon her breast and doing violence to her own feelings to answer him, "I would take what was mine by legal and honest right, but forgive me, after what you have told me I could not take a gift of that sort."

He looked at her flushed cheeks and clenched hands, and his nervousness increased as he remembered that girls

of this sort, though they might be ready to die like Iphigenia, would often scorn the smaller sacrifice of some fastidious scruple.

“Not if he wished to marry you?” he asked in a lower tone.

“Is it only because you wish to see me married that you talk like *this*? Do you not remember that I am young and able-bodied, and that I can do—something?” she asked a little indignantly, seeing that he avoided her direct glances and was not skilled in the art of equivocation, though there was a wonderful tenderness in his rough voice. “Don’t talk to me any more in that way, dear. You know I think single women are often happier than married ones,” she added, relenting as she always did whenever she thought she had caused her benefactor pain.

Her own great grief seemed almost to

pull her to pieces. She kept up before Mr. Bardsley that he should not guess how she felt it. But there was a moment of despairing dejection as she went out from his presence in which she seemed to feel as if a curse had fallen on all that she had attempted.

Hoping that the fresh air would help to brace her nerves, she rambled on to the well-remembered cliffs, from whence she could see the purple headlands stooping grandly down to the sea, with foam shooting in clouds of spray into the air, and the wild wind driving the crested waves on the rocks.

It seemed hard to leave it all ; to have to say good-bye to the old life, and to go into the new world and bear the inheritance of a stained name. But how she would have hated the home of her childhood if it could have remained hers by dint

of the pine woods, and the spicy scent and golden sunshine after rain as refreshing as English April showers. The tinkling of the horses' bells, the low of the cattle, the rush of the silver streams when they were unbound from the frost—all the music of the Alpine concert seemed to fill his ears with harmony and to drive away black melancholy.

Monaco itself—nestling like a little gem between Nice and Mentone, below the Corniche road, with the grey-green foliage of the olive-trees coming right down to the Mediterranean, with its blue horseshoe-shaped bay enclosed by two rocky capes, and the Italian town of Bordighera seen in the remote distance—was a sight to drive away the “blues.”

In one of the gayest of the gay hotels

of Monte Carlo, all looking like little cardboard houses brightly painted in water-colours, and close by the gardens and terraces of the Casino, he found Olive and her mother. The former had recovered her appearance, and was looking handsomer than ever, making a sensation when she displayed her prettiest toilettes on the "Boulevard de la Condamine," but more often favouring the Casino or the "hall of conversation."

But Humphrey was still dull. The excellent music of the concert-room or the attractions of the roulette-tables, where every type of European society could be studied, from the Scotchman to the Chinaman, did little to rouse him from his reserve. And in the evenings—which were the gayest times of all for Olive, with the most elegant costumes

sweeping the polished floors, and the enlivening sound of the clinking of money as it was raked away by the croupiers—Humphrey wore more than ever his air of being bored.

Even the crowd round the table, all intent on gambling, with its princesses and pickpockets, its countesses and chevaliers, did little to amuse him. He slightly raised his eyebrows when Olive seated herself at the table, concealing behind her lace ruffles and her nosegay of fresh flowers the fluctuations of her small piles of coin; but when it was pointed out to him that there were pretty innocent English girls, paterfamilias, and editors of English journals who exposed themselves, in their turns, to be the observed of worthy folks who came to stare round them as they would in a menagerie, he contented himself with

simply shrugging his shoulders, and refusing to interfere in a matter which did not concern him.

All the players had to prick or otherwise mark on ruled cards the varying fortunes of the game, and he contented himself by showing his dislike to the whole thing by refusing to look at Olive's card, and declaring that the room was so hot, and there was such an absence of ventilation, it was impossible for any man in his senses to stay long in the Casino.

When, according to the fashion of the place, Olive gave him her fan or her handkerchief to hold, he offended her by eyeing the properties offered to him as if he did not know what they were meant for. As to flourishing in the company of other "gilded youth" and sinking the business man "full fathom

five" in the excitement of the place, never before had he felt such a strange desire for work, such an unaccountable feeling as if he had been "shunted" out of the proper duties of his life and deluded into leading a mere butterfly existence.

"What makes you look so moping? Any one might say that you had just got out of a sick bed, so pale and haggard do you look. You surely don't find fault with me for playing? One would think you were a girl, looking upon races and cards as if they were synonymous with all kinds of evil."

"Why do you play? I can't quite understand what is your motive in doing so. Do you wish to make yourself the observed of all gazers? I suppose you know that you contrast very prettily with some of the other women, who are like

old china, cracked and cemented for the market."

"I can't make long speeches about it; I hate explanations. I always told you I was not a pedant. I suppose I play because I like it."

"That is the way with children when they want to excuse themselves for nonsense."

"There are grown-up children," she answered defiantly.

"More's the pity. Women ought not to remain children all their lives."

"It is my fate. I can't help it. You need not expose my incapacity."

He knew that he was absurdly inconsistent in blaming her for her nature, and that his remarks were almost rude, but he was somehow irritated by the contrast between her physical charms and the little pains which she took to

please in her conversation, her want of tact, her want of intellect—the contrast jarred on him.

“I don’t wish to see you become like the other women here, women who are like a flock of sheep in following each other’s sillinesses, and whose idea of happiness is to have a number of men dangling after them, no matter how weak or wicked they may be.”

The last shot told home.

“I don’t know why you should be so spiteful to poor old Count von Hanneberg,” she said, with a blush. “It is not *my* fault if he insists on following me all the time like Hamlet followed the Ghost, and you know half the stories they tell about him are not true.”

“That nice little story, for instance, of his playing so extensively that he was

unable to distinguish between his own winnings and other people's?"

"Gross scandal!" she said impatiently.

"Scandal or not, for a time he was forbidden the rooms, and the directors are so 'grieved' to do a thing of that kind," he added mockingly.

"Commend me to men for egregious gossips. If I were you I would sooner go and help with the diggings at Pompeii than rake up these mummy-like stories of years ago."

"You have positively been reading."

"Not I. I sometimes take the trouble to look at the fashion sheets of the Paris paper, but I can get all my other information second-hand."

"Well, Hannenberg is a 'plunger.' It is the existence of these sort of fellows which would make me sign the petition to

the French Government for doing away with the gambling."

Her large violet eyes seemed to be suddenly brightened with intelligence, and she burst out laughing.

"Who would think you could be so jealous?" she said, when her laughter had somewhat abated—laughter which was like a peal of bells, and which displayed to full advantage the unbroken arch of her regular white teeth. "Do you expect me to make myself disagreeable to poor old Hannenbergh merely to please *you*?"

"Not unless you have a *good reason* for pleasing me," he answered, lowering his voice.

Why he made that sudden answer which, in a great measure, decided his destiny he could never afterwards tell. There are moments in which we are

scarcely conscious of the impulse which drives us on. Olive's beauty had certainly never looked more brilliant than it did at Monaco. The clear white and carnation of her English complexion, the brightness of her eyes, and the perfect lines of her figure, had never impressed him with such admiration till he saw her with her present surroundings. But he despised himself even as he admired. Hair brown or black, eyes grey or blue, should *these* things have such power to influence him that—after he had known Godwyn—in choosing a wife he should stop to meditate on these points as if he were choosing a horse or a toy terrier? The fault, he thought in his bitterness, was the fault of the men who had a habit of treating their wives and daughters as if they were creatures no more equal to themselves than toy

terriers were equal to the West-End ladies who adored them. If he married Olive he would cure her of setting such a high store on these mere personal attractions. Her vanity had been satisfied by the extravagant compliments which Count von Hannenberg had paid her—*he* would pay her no such compliments.

And so he said, whilst she hesitated,

“I am afraid you will think me a great nuisance. Some of the men here are ladies'-maids a little over-grown. I can never be a lady's-maid.”

She laughed again, showing the little teeth which were like a row of white cowries.

“I used to think you a terrible nuisance when you were a boy, and I must confess your old aunts were greater

nuisances still. Perhaps it's in the family."

"Perhaps it is," he answered gravely. "You had better think whether you can endure it, and whether the allurements of a steady income such as I can offer you can compete successfully with the attractions of a more butterfly life."

"You are fond of talking about 'butterflies,'" she said, with a pretty little *moue*. "Women are not generally supposed to have much meaning in what they say, but I think men have not either. I don't know what you mean, but I am sure you will remember that I have always been used to enjoy myself. I don't see what is the use of living if we are not to have amusement."

He did not explain what he meant. He might have found it rather difficult. He was not much given to moralising

over existence in general, and could not have told her that he was thinking what a stupid thing life was, and how petty and mean were the passions and ambitions of most people. It was an unsatisfactory sort of love-making. He did not even take her to his arms or kiss her, and she caught herself thinking, in a dissatisfied, half-acknowledged way, that in winning him she had somehow won the shadow instead of the substance.

"Quite a delightful and romantic story," said the people at Mowbray. "They say that now she has promised to marry him she has consented to give up all her little freedoms. So particular, you know, those English."

Many eyes would follow them when they wandered, as said Humphrey's realiter master, on the rocky cliffs, which were partially covered with tropical plants,

or amongst the paths and terraces, which were set with aloes, prickly pears, marigolds, and varieties of cactus.

“Are they not a handsome couple?” people would say, as they whispered at their appearance, and even Count von Hannen-berg was compelled to admit that his rival was attractive, and just the sort of fellow many women would be fond of.

Only Olive's mother had her doubts upon the subject, and thought sometimes with a pang of the ill success of her scheme and the difficulties which still existed concerning her daughter's future happiness. There was something forced in Humphrey's manner as he listened to the chatter of his ladylove. His memory evidently oppressed him, and as they sat together on the seats beneath the shadow of the almond-trees or more

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“Quite a delightful and romantic story,” said the people at Monaco. “They say that now she has promised to marry him she has consented to give up all her little frivolities. So particular, you know, those English.”

Many eyes would follow them when they wandered, to suit Humphrey's healthier tastes, on the ruddy cliffs, which were partially covered with tropical plants,

or amongst the paths and terraces, which were set with aloes, prickly pears, marigolds, and varieties of cactus.

“Are they not a handsome couple?” people would say, as they whispered at their appearance, and even Count von Hannenberg was compelled to admit that his rival was attractive, and just the sort of fellow many women would be fond of.

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sombre cypresses, looking down upon the querulous gulls riding upon the waves beneath, he would often fall into deep reveries, not hearing her when she addressed him. At such times, when Olive complained to her of Humphrey's strange and bewildering moods, Mrs. Neale guessed too truly at the secret of his heart—how the remembrance of another woman was going everywhere with him against his will, inseparable as his shadow. To her daughter she never whispered of the pain which she suspected was constantly at his heart. It was easier for her to say,

“I don't wish to damp you. I see you are very much in love, and it is quite a new experience to you, but I fear lest you should rush a little too quickly into the determination of marriage. Before you take the irrevocable step, I should

like you to wait and reflect a little."

"You never said so before," answered Olive, with a pout.

"No; the circumstances were different. Have you forgotten about those debts? Is Humphrey the man to pay them and not to question you about them? Olive, you know I tried my very best to prevent this happening. But, situated as you are with a couple of lovers, each laughing at the other's presumption, and with the one, if he is older, prepared to pay for *all* your extravagances, you may excuse me if I begin to doubt a little which will suit you the best of the two. It is too late for us to look back; but I should have been firmer with you before. You know I would cut off my right hand if I could do so to free you from this dilemma!"

Olive looked up, and her eyes met her mother's whose own were full of pity and sorrow, she thought. She was touched, and burst into sudden tears, being petted and soothed as one might have soothed a child, and Humphrey coming in when the two were embracing each other took the scene rather coldly, and found it difficult to understand what ailed his betrothed. He cared little for these demonstrative exhibitions of feeling, and in the bottom of his heart was anxious and uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XI.

“**I** BELIEVE a feather might have floored him, so much was he taken by surprise,” said the garrulous English waiter at the hotel at which Humphrey Bardsley lodged, when the latter received a telegram telling him of the state of things at Dornton.

That Hayden should have “bolted,” as Humphrey called it, leaving his poor old uncle in the lurch to manage the workpeople when they were in such a state of insubordination, and that he himself should have been wrapped in

such a state of false security as to be seeking his own pleasure and leaving others to brave the storm, were at first considerations which were nearly maddening. He, like Godwyn, had distrusted Hayden, but never to this terrible extent. If the rabble had called the hated manager a thief or a cheat, he would without hesitation have contradicted them; but he recollected that he had himself to blame for his inertia.

“Did you ever see anything so hopeless as he is?” exclaimed Olive to her mother when she received a letter from her lover about it. “He knows that his money is gone, and he is afflicted with heaviness of spirits less for the loss of his money than for the treachery of his agent. Could you believe that a man who is so clever in some things

could reason so much like a baby in others?"

"The money is not *all* gone. There must still be a sufficient provision."

"For 'respectable' humdrum people to live upon, or for a young couple beginning life, with books about cookery and manuals for 'household management,' but not to pay for what you call 'extravagances,'" cried Olive despairingly. "If the place is sold it will be perfectly dreadful!"

"You might take a smaller house and begin in a quieter way," said Mrs. Neale, at her wits' end how to speak for the best.

"And not be able to 'receive'—not know any of the county families!" cried Olive, who regarded the latter idea as a ghastly suggestion.

She did not look much like a girl who had been broken in to endure the hardships of life when she sent for Humphrey to see her that very evening, and admitted him into a pretty boudoir lighted up with many wax-lights and with a blazing fire. Her face looked grey and changed in spite of a becoming evening dress, with much old lace about the neck and arms, for she really loved him after her selfish fashion, but if she had found him lying dead she could scarcely have been more shocked than she was by his sudden statement that he was ruined, or next to ruined, and she knew that her whole future depended on what she should say and do during the next few minutes.

Humphrey himself had come to her, a little nervous and agitated, with a sense of no income, which—he could

not tell why—was very far from lying as heavily as it should have done on his conscience.

“I lost no time in writing to you. I thought it would be more honourable,” he said, turning away his face from her as if he doubted his power to look at her.

“Ah yes, your *honour*! your word of honour!” she repeated passionately, “that big word to which men sacrifice so much. I think you might have broken the news a little more carefully to me.”

“If you love me and I love you the thing can make no difference,” he answered a little hoarsely, still turning away his head.

“Cannot it? We must face the future—we must look at it in all its aspects,” she was beginning, when he in-

interrupted her, speaking harshly and even resentfully,

“Why veil the fact?” he asked. “I think Talleyrand himself might have learned diplomacy from *you*. If you love me, the rest is nothing; if not, why waste words about it? Why not tear away at once the delicate network of deception which has been spun over the fact that you never really cared for me? Why, what women call love—the majority of women—has no more resemblance to nature than if it were a pantomime! With hearts as dry as Gideon’s fleece they will pretend to love and value a fellow, and directly there is a fear about his losing his money-bags they have a different code of morals for cloud and for sunshine.”

She did not answer him. She stood listening to him with her hands clasped

above her head, and even in his excitement he could not help noticing the beauty of the blue-veined inner sides of the perfectly-modelled arms from which the lace fell back, and the form of the pretty little nostrils, inflated, like Vivien's, with scornful anger.

“Thank God that my opinion of womanhood is not lowered through *you*,” he continued, interpreting her silence and the way in which she looked at him. “I know better and truer women. Thank God I can bear to part from you! So help me Heaven, I have not come to ask for any favours or assistance from *you*!”

She burst into passionate tears; her vanity was wounded. And he said, speaking more softly,

“I would rather see you cry than try to make a joke about it. I understand

now that you valued me only for my supposed belongings. Let us be mutually thankful that things have not gone far between us. No engagement now exists. I never planned to bring poverty on you."

Even her tears made no difference to him at that moment. He began to feel as if he were freed from the fatal glamour of her beauty, and was justified in his anger and disgust at her readiness to dismiss him. He had been duped and cajoled, he thought, there could be no doubt of it now, but he thanked God that the girl had not duped him to the bitter end.

"Keep your reproaches to yourself," she said, with a sudden flash of anger answering to his own. "Is it *my* fault if they ask more from me than I am able to perform? I am weary of the comedy

which I play night and day. God knows I am weary of it, but I don't know how to break through it. How would you like—if I married you—to be surrounded by a set of people who, if not exactly duns, would be something very nearly like it, and would not wait for their money without exposing you to disagreeable consequences?"

"You should put them off with pretty speeches," he said, still with bitterness. "Women who are worth anything know how to make a fine art of bills. Their delicate intuition and their diplomatic art should serve them well in such exigencies."

"Go if you have been telegraphed for," she answered, speaking with shaking voice. "Go whilst I have strength to part with you. I know it will be better for both of us. Go! I will write

to you at Dornton, but don't say a word to my mother. I will make her understand everything."

* * * * *

"I must make haste and marry the Marquis of Carrabas, the Lord of Golconda, or something of that sort," she said wearily when she told the story to Mrs. Neale that night, trying to think herself cured when she gave an exaggerated account of Humphrey's temper.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "Marquis of Carrabas" was personified by poor old Count von Hannenberg. Olive tried to persuade herself that he was in person and character about twenty years younger than his real age. Infirm and suffering, yet always smiling, he had hidden under wig and broadcloth a mute despair, till he met the pretty English girl to whom he looked for the brightness of his remaining days. He had seen much, had made long journeys, had picked up a little knowledge, and had a good memory,

so had it not been for the whispered tales concerning his antecedents he might not only have passed current at Monaco, but his society might have been courted as that of a man who had "perfected," as he declared, "an infallible system" for gamblers.

"You can't understand the sort of pressure which has been put upon me," Olive wrote to Humphrey in a final letter of farewell; and he, ready to blame Mrs. Neale for sacrificing her daughter on the altar of expediency, wrote in answer,

"I assure you I blame you for nothing. I am quite as ready to blame myself for my own precipitation in hurrying on the engagement, and it is only a pity that you showed a want of confidence in me by not telling me everything before."

Now that it was all over he was ready to moralise in a cynical way about it, looking upon society as a masquerade in which the women especially wore masks veiling their true selves from each other. The die was cast, the victory was won; he had lost his wealth, but he was free from a fatal spell, and stood erect again, an independent man. The knowledge of Olive's fresh engagement scarcely caused him a momentary pang; the only wonder to him now was that he ever could have gazed with idiotic admiration on the face of a woman who could be guilty of such double-dealing. The discovery that moral deformity could exist in such a perfect form seemed only to have increased his yearning after the good and noble.

In the same frame of mind that he was ready to reason severely on the

conduct of those changeable women who are aware of their power, and use it to irritate and console, madden and reconsole, playing upon the finest feelings of men as upon so much common catgut, a sickening conviction came upon him of the utter uselessness of his former life. It was as if the cord of self-approbation, strained too forcibly, had suddenly rebounded like the snapping of the strongest string of some worm-eaten musical instrument, carrying away the sounding-board and all that had made the harmony.

He despised himself for slouching and dawdling through the best years of his existence, and determined to try and undo a little of what his folly and neglect had accomplished. It seemed to him that he must work a little, be his work ever so small, or so unrewarded; and

when after his rapid journey to Dornton he was met by the condolences of cold-blooded, ungenial acquaintances, or the despairing exclamations of his friends, he could only say to himself, "Whatever harm I may have done by my indifference I must take the consequences of and try my best to undo."

"We must reconcile ourselves to the dispensations of an inscrutable Providence," said Aunt Rachel as she met him when he arrived at the manor-house, informing him that fearful things had happened since he had left, quite revolutionary in fact.

"I fancy I have heard that remark before, but we must know what Providence intends before we reconcile ourselves," Humphrey surprised her by answering as he divested himself of his great-

coat. "I must go through with this thing; as to these men, I must enforce obedience."

"A creditable attempt after practicability, but I fear it comes too late," said Mr. Bardsley, shaking his head after listening for some time to his nephew's projects, whilst Miss Rachel enlarged on the discontent and unreasonableness of the men who would "sauce him straight to his face" if he attempted to "make them hear reason."

"The difficulty may possibly yield to energetic action. Abuses have crept in; there must be a fair division of labour," continued Humphrey, speaking rapidly, and the old man looked up again astonished, wondering that until now he had never understood the younger one's character.

"These things must be seen to at

any cost," added Humphrey, attempting to arouse himself from his inertia, and speaking really eloquently and forcibly of the danger of an irreparable breach between employer and employed, with hardship and unfairness on the one side, and bitterness and hatred on the other.

"I must say I sympathise with the men in their desire to rise to a better condition," he explained, astonishing his uncle more and more, "I don't mean to make excuses for the agitators who have been exciting these ignorant fellows, while they are most mischievous in their own idleness and uneducated themselves. But we must either march with the times or be put on one side altogether. It is time for feudal relations to be past, and absurd to try to restore the past

instead of looking for better things in the future."

"Where did he pick up all this Radicalism?" asked Aunt Rachel thoroughly alarmed, and then remembering that the absent Godwyn had been given to speaking something in the same unorthodox style, she thought it better to inquire no further.

But Humphrey was not content with "speaking;" for that very afternoon, tired as he was with his journey, he sought out the groups of discontented workers who were standing together near the public-houses, with their voices raised in stormy conference, and keeping himself from using the imperative tone which might have exasperated them, summoned them to a meeting to discuss their grievances on the morrow.

When the morrow came, the ladies in

the manor-house were a good deal alarmed at the numbers of rough men and women who accepted Humphrey's invitation. The gate was unceremoniously thrown open, and a mob of people rushed rudely into the garden, filling every vacant space to the great damage of the shrubs and flowers. There was a large infusion of labourers from other villages, and all seemed to be in the mood for an exciting row. So numerous were they that it was necessary for him to address them from the balcony, the frightened servants insisting on barring the doors against the intruders. Mr. Bardsley had retired in a state of protest to his sanctum, from whence he could look out on the front of the house, shaking his head over his nephew's ill-advised attempt.

“He may understand about diamond

rings, horses, and cricket, but he is an absolute ignoramus in matters of business and knowledge of the world," he remarked somewhat testily to his sister Rachel. "I shouldn't wonder if he'll have the windows broken, and his own skull into the bargain."

Meanwhile Humphrey, driven without preparation to his maiden speech, was addressing the mob in his loudest and clearest tones.

"I have invited you," he said, "to talk this over like *men*. You have your grievance, and *I* have my grievance, but we are still separate members of one body—the interests of master and workmen are identical."

"He the master! a whippersnapper like 'im!"

"Hauld yer tongue, bantam!" shouted different voices amongst the crowd, as

a few of the more daring spirits, who had been urged on by the wire-pullers amongst the Unionists, elbowed their way to the scene of action.

“Do you dislike the word ‘master?’ Then call me your *friend*,” he continued, with a good-tempered laugh. “I know that a few sugarplums of speech have been lavished on my uncle as well as on myself whenever our backs have chanced to be turned, and I am ready to swallow the sugarplums; but *somebody* must guide the reins in an affair of this sort, and is it wise to chafe and kick directly the collar galls a little, so as to knock the whole thing—shafts and driving-seat—to pieces? For my own part I will have nothing to do with the wastefulness and selfishness which makes the rich rob the poor of their pleasure in life, turning men into machines. My friends,

I am ready to make fair concessions."

"We're not your friends," shouted a voice.

"Hark at him, lads, with all his pictures and his fine trappings, his works of hart!" cried another interrupter, who had been preparing for the campaign over gin-and-water, and who waved his hands with a Gracchus-like gesture at the manor-house.

"Ah! you are right there," cried Humphrey, not disregarding the hint. "But why should you look upon me as on the enemy's side? What should I care for purchasing new works of art, bought with profits which might be disproportionate—the very lifeblood of the workers? Before I met you I had determined to part with that house, and to build, if possible, new ones for you.

A smaller house will do for me ; and if you continue to live in a state which has sometimes filled me with shame and disgust, it shall not be because there is any unfair division of profit. The division shall be a just one. You cannot expect me to make concessions which will involve any serious loss to the business, but where there is a real grievance I hope to be able to apply a remedy. It is only lately I have been told how your own physical surroundings have been in some respects bad, and we must set to work to remedy them—you as well as I—you must not let all your wages go to the beer-shops."

"Nice state of things to keep a poor man from his beer and shut up the publics," cried one of the interferers.

"Nice condition of things when we are to be entirely at the mercy of other

men's interference," shouted Humphrey in reply, "I didn't say that anyone would shut up the publics, I said that the surplus wages should not go in beer. What have we to fight about? A desire for peace on both sides ought speedily to insure a peaceful negotiation."

He waited to take breath, wondering if a disinterested outsider would accuse him of being impulsive and of yielding too readily to the opposition. But already the anger of the crowd had cooled itself.

"What's he speechifying like that for? Takes us to be uncommon soft if we b'lieve in all that sawder," cried the workman who had interrupted him once or twice before.

"Mebbe he's in the right of it," answered another, nudging his neighbour.

“Don’t let’s clap the saddle on the wrong baste;” whilst one of the grave-eyed, quieter-looking men, who had belonged to Godwyn’s class, turned round authoritatively and said,

“Tell yew what, lads, ye’ll let the gen’lman have his say or it’ll be the woorse for yew.”

“The power of combination, let me tell you,” continued Humphrey, “is quite as much for the advantage of the master as the workman. If you agitate, if you threaten, I have done with you. You only show your melancholy ignorance of the proper relations which should exist between us.”

He was once more interrupted by a mocking observation amongst the crowd, but it was evident that there was a change in the popular spirit, and his voice

rang out again clearly as ever, as he went on.

“Why protract this contest? Why engage in a useless struggle? In my opinion, all this love of agitating destroys the manhood and nobility of the British workmen. In the truest sense I will identify myself with the party for progress, but your interests, as I reminded you before, are identical with mine. You are opening the door to those foreigners who have taken advantage of the working man's grievance. Tidings of keen competition reach us from all quarters, and the explanation of such competition is not far to seek. If ever there was a time when steady development of our home industries was an absolute necessity, that time is now. I appeal to you as Englishmen as well as workmen. Before you commit yourselves to a suicidal

policy, you should hear how unnecessary it is for you to cut your own throats; plenty of other people on the other side of the water are ready and eager to do it for you. 'It is live and let live,' my men," he said, casting his anxious eyes down on the faces which were gape-mouthed at this part of his speech. "If you knew all about the outside world just now, beyond our little place in Devonshire, you would know that there were plenty of competitors ready to enter the lists against you, watching their opportunity, as they have a perfect right to do, in case we squabble amongst ourselves or prove so lazy and muddle-headed as to give a chance for the tide of commerce to turn in their favour. Now listen to me, I don't want to preach to you, but I will make you a fair offer, and I expect a fair answer. Forget this

nonsense and act like sensible men. I am not to be intimidated, but I will give you what is just and right. I will pay you the highest wages I can afford to give you, but I must earn a livelihood as well as you, and if I find that the markets are already overstocked, and if you persist in an obstinate attempt to ruin me, it may be better for me to shut the mills altogether, and have recourse to some other means of livelihood."

"Shut the mills," grumbled some of the men, who had already begun to discuss whether the offer should not be accepted and the strike deferred.

"Shut the mills!" when they knew it would be difficult for them to obtain employment elsewhere, and when old associations bound them to the spot! The faces of the listeners became black.

“I warned you,” he continued, taking advantage of the murmuring sounds of discontent. “Did I not tell you that it was possible to kick the shafts to pieces? I give you fair notice that if you continue to oppose me in an obstinate spirit you may not have seen to the bitter end of this. Are your wives and families to starve? Are you to continue out of work, and go to the workhouse? That is not *my* way of settling the difficulty. It is not by starving the labourer or by employing cheap and inferior labour that British manufacture is to succeed.”

Cheers followed the declaration, and he warmed as he continued,

“I will reward you for your energy, aptitude, and skill, but we must mutually trust each other. If business could only be obtained by screwing down wages I

would rather be without it ; but you must recollect, on the one hand, that dear labour stimulates invention—already we have been introducing more machinery instead of hand-labour. Join a Union by all means, and be maintained by the hard-earned money of your fellow-workmen—how is such a plan to end ? Men and masters are both in difficulties just now, and it may be hard for us to see our way out of them, but let us stand by each other. A Union to ensure against illness and old age is a very different thing from a Union which enables you to go on strike and may lead to intimidation and tyranny. There is an evil, as you all think, in foreign competition, and there is as great an evil in the payment of higher wages to be expended at the public house. Hitherto we have given in to the habit adopted with regard to the

farm-labourers, and paid you a portion of your wages in cider. We shall do so no longer, and those of you who like to be saving in your habits will have the more to spend on your wives and families, if it does not always go in drink."

The women murmured approbation of this arrangement, and the men had nothing to say against it.

"We have much to learn—all of us—I as well as you. Let us make a clean slate of the past; let bygones be bygones on both sides," continued Humphrey, concluding his short harangue, to the wonder of Mr. Bardsley, and amidst another cheer from his audience, with a few practical, common-sense remarks, which showed a range of observation which could scarcely have been expected of him, a knowledge of markets and the

state of trade which he must have managed to pick up in a comparatively short time.

“He has a real commercial, administrative capacity, and *I* never gave him credit for it,” said the old man to his sister. “It is wonderful, considering he never received a proper technical education for it.”

“No, I don’t think we shall need any one’s arbitration. They are good-hearted fellows at the bottom, and begin already to understand me,” said Humphrey, as he stepped from the balcony as the crowd of workers dispersed, and the dead calm which followed was like the lull of the wind when a storm has spent itself. “It was Godwyn who taught me first of all how to manage my own men, it was she who showed me how to meet them face to face as if I were their

brother. By-the-by," he said, speaking hurriedly, as soon as he had his uncle to himself, "what is this mystery about Godwyn? Mystery upon mystery it seems to me it is since I was fool enough to leave home in such a hurry! How strange women are! Why could she not remain with you? Her heart seemed to be in this work at Dornton. She could do anything with the men. I do believe that she would have the courage to stand face to face in an emergency with what they call the 'dangerous classes,' and *make* them listen to her. Here at Dornton she was working wonders! What possessed her to go away from it at the beck and call of a father who never troubled himself to inquire if she were alive or not?"

"A great many questions at once. I don't know which to answer first."

“To say the least of it, it seems strange.”

“Godwyn is not strange; she is intelligent and noble, with depths of unselfish devotion, bright and courageous though so stricken, and though I used to think that women should not interfere with working-men, hers was an exceptional case, and, as you say, she did some good. Do not continue that old joke about her strangeness; it wounds me, and it would wound *you* if you suspected, as I do, that she really cares for you. If at the bottom of her pure heart there is a secret which I would not confide to you till I thought you were worthy of so delicate a confidence, you may at least abstain from making fun of her.”

“How little you know about it,” said Humphrey passionately; “how you wrong

me by jumping to such conclusions! Godwyn's happiness is everything to me."

"My poor boy," answered the old man, suddenly perceiving how terribly in earnest he was, "when I think that without that foolish fancy for a stranger you might have been so happy! However, we will say nothing about it; we must both of us hide our anxieties about Godwyn."

Humphrey was silent for a minute, during which he was hot and then cold with fluctuations of feeling. He felt dissatisfied with his speech now that it was over. It seemed to him words—words—mere words which he had wasted—very tame words with which he had tried to assail the crass ignorance and dogged obstinacy of his hearers. He had forgotten half the things he had meant to say. He had

spoken over their heads instead of addressing them in terse Saxon speech as he had meant to do when he commenced. Never before had he felt how terribly he wanted Godwyn, not only for himself but to help him to deal with these people. It had come to such a pass, that his life could not be lived without her. Then he burst out, to his uncle's surprise,

“I don't see the meaning of it. There can't be any possible good in letting this mystery continue. I suppose I am to understand, from what you tell me, that she is living in some wretched London slum, and we both know that she would go straight to the stake if she thought it was her duty.”

“If she thought it was her duty!” repeated the old man, who had become weak

and nerveless with his disappointments, despairingly.

“Yes, if she doesn’t sink under the weight of her cares. You do not wish her to be a sacrifice to her own devotion, and we are not to be accomplices in a case of suicide, I presume,” continued the young man, who was burning with indignation at the insult which he thought had been brought to bear upon Godwyn. “What right can that scapegrace of a father have to the services of a girl who has proved herself to be so simple, true, and gracious among women?”

“You are enthusiastic,” answered Mr. Bardsley drily. “I wish you had been enthusiastic long ago. You are poor and she is poor; I do not see what is to come of it *now*. She thinks herself disgraced by this story about her father. You were

always a little fastidious ; could you bear the talk about it ?”

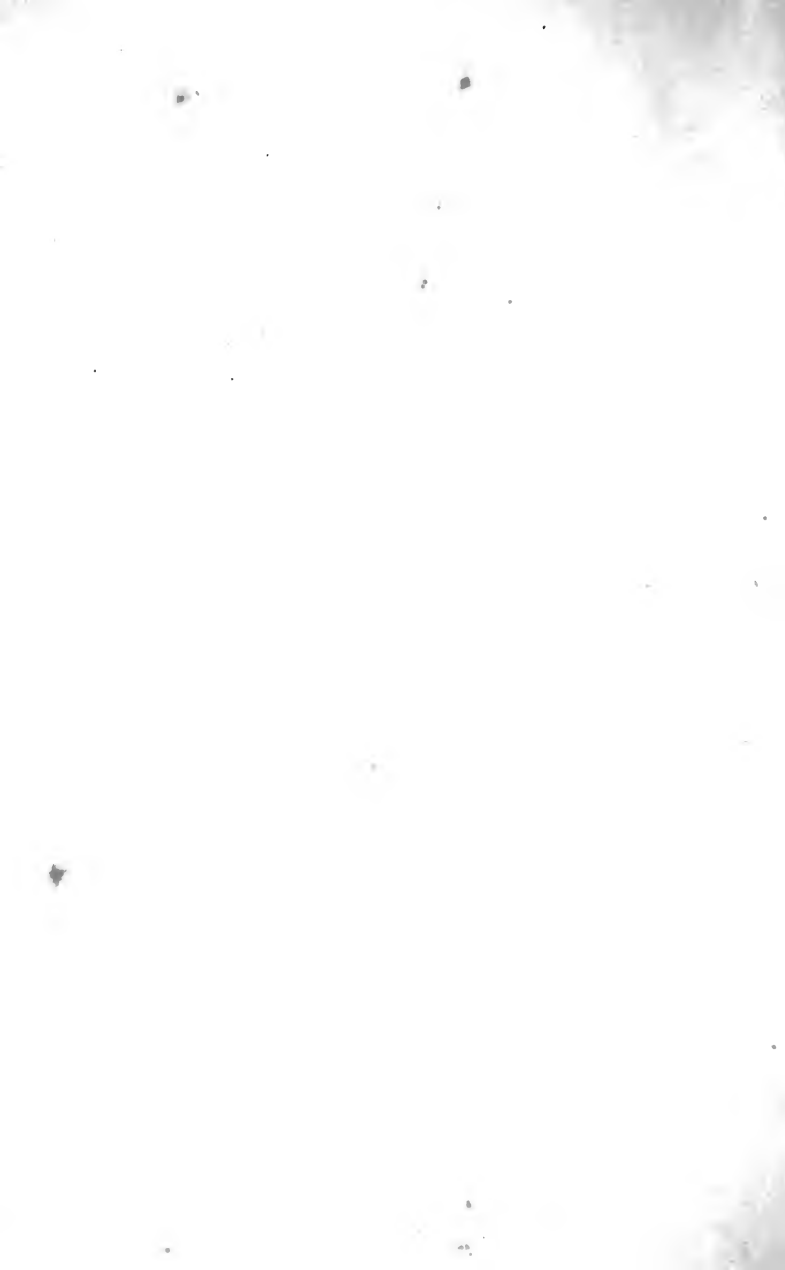
“ I cared for such things once ; I care for them no longer. What is such talk at the worst of it ?—a great splash, a few circles of water, then everything as it was before. If she hadn't a farthing in the world, and her birth were more objectionable than it is, she would still have a value superior to any of these distinctions—she would be the one woman in the world to me, and I would marry her.”

“ It is very fine to talk like that. If you had talked so a little earlier I should have said ‘ Amen ’ to it.”

“ If you won't say ‘ Amen ’ to it now because you think I am changeable, I assure you you are mistaken. I am impulsive no longer ; I reason quite logically

about it. It is the most reasonable thing in the world ; we can neither of us live without her, and I am going to try to get her to come back."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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